

"DO YOU SEE THIS?"

THE

POCKET NOVELS.

PIFFIN THE PHILANTHROPIST.

MY AUNT'S UMBRELLA.

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES BENNETT.

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CHAPTER I.



AK - APPLE Row was one of the most indubitable and confirmed eyesores that disfigure this great metropolis. It was one of those incurable, ever - increasing festers of filth and misery; one of those uncared for, unprotected, unvisited centric of squalor, where neglect—the mother of cely,

sease — spawned unmolested a daily brood of terrors.

It would be difficult to say where Oak-Apple Row was situated, it was so jammed up and surrounded by courts, buildings, and streets, of an uniform offensive character and inextricable tortuity; the speediest approach to it, however, from the nearest thoroughfare of any pretensions, seemed to be down a blind alley and through the back yard of a slaughter-house. This remarkable discovery was due to the instinctive energy and genius of the Parish Beadle in charge of the parochial fire-engine, who, in his excitement to reach a blazing flue in Oak-Apple Row, and being guided solely by his sense of locality and the smell of the burning soot, had dashed wildly through all obstacles, and, to his surprise and satisfaction, had suddenly found that he had unravelled a mystery, to which the North West Passage—if it ever should be made—might be considered a parallel feat. There was also a very near way it was argued by climbing over the railings of a dirty, wretched little grave-yard (situated at no great distance from the Row), and threading your passage through the few stunted yellow memorials of decay that lolled out of the jumbled and poisonous earth—monuments more emblematic of death to those who lived and breathed ınd them than of those whose remains rested so ›rably beneath them; but then this route was

by no means certain or pleasant, for, apart from the offensive nature of the little charnel-ground, which not even the population of the Row could wholly fail to perceive, there were superstitions connected with it; and the ghost of the alderman, in a three-cornered hat and bag wig, who walked about the graveyard and sniffed the air thereof in an approving manner, had been made to assume, with profound effect, the proverbial functions of the usually well-known monsters designed by maternal imaginations for the chastisement of their offspring.

The houses in Oak-Apple Row were numerous and peculiar. They seemed to have been originally built with the most extreme solicitude for the misery of human beings in general, and poor human beings in particular. It immediately struck you on observing them, or going over them, what a remarkably clever fellow the architect must have been, to have designed tenements with such a very elaborate caution that everything should be antagonistic to the comfort, or even the existence, of the tenants; and the only clue by which you could safely conjecture that they were intended for human occupants at all, would have arisen from the conviction that every other known animal would instinctively have avoided such domiciles. The houses being so very bad in their original construction, of course the inhabitants, with that remarkable and eccentric perversity which displays itself so unfortunately,

but yet so forcibly, in poor neighbourhoods, seemed to exert themselves to the utmost to make everything worse. Because the rooms were very low and small, they were used simultaneously as bedrooms and workshops, and the windows were kept scrupulously closed; because the kitchens were underground and very damp, they were selected as the best apartments, and the extraordinary and unaccountable affection which exists amongst certain classes for taking up their residence in the kitchen was nowhere so strongly developed as in the Row; because the garrets were at the top of the house, and comparatively the healthiest portion, they were let off, at a nominal rent, to professional pigeon-fanciers, who built mysterious scaffoldings and hutches round the chimney-pots, and appeared to pass their lives in sitting upon their handiwork, and whistling violently, in the treble key, to bodies of unclean birds whirling in the heavens; because the street itself was very narrow and had no sewerage, all the refuse of the houses was thrown into the centre of it, which formed large hills of filth over its whole extent, the prescriptive right of wallowing therein being confined to the pigs, cocks and hens, and small boys and girls generally pertaining to the neighbourhood; and, as if this were not enough, the washing of the locality, as much as there was of it, was hung out to dry across the road, from house to house and from floor to floor,

seething, reeking, and swinging in the putrid atmosphere, like a huge scratch-cradle of misery and corruption ; because there was no water laid on to the houses, what could be more consistent than that somebody should have stolen the handle of the pump, near the slaughter-house yard, to vend at the price of old iron? and because there was only one water-butt in the whole street, what more appropriate proceeding could have been adopted than to use it as a dust-bin ?

There were other charms, too, connected with the locality, which rendered it no doubt additionally attractive to the inhabitants : for, besides the graveyard which we have described, and the slaughter-house to which we have incidentally referred, and which we ought perhaps to add was the occasion of a great deal of intense excitement and interest in the Row on killing days, when it generally happened that some unfortunate beast escaped from its executioners, and was thereupon nearly goaded to death up and down the Row by the frantic and excited population,—we should also mention the fact of their being an iron factory, that worked all night and emitted volumes of smoke of the blackest possible nature, and enough "noisy, noxious, and offensive trades" carried on in the various mysterious nooks and corners of the Row to have broken any number of covenants in any number of leases that could be named. There were

the working cobblers, the tinmen, the tobacco-pipe makers, the pigeon-fanciers, and others, to say nothing of the independent portion of the community, who existed upon the thievings of their family circles, vegetables, and gin. The moral economy of the place was not a whit better than the domestic or social: for, as a rule, everybody was at enmity with his neighbour, practically exemplified by the perpetual fighting that took place in the Row; and, as a popular habit, everybody got drunk in the most regular manner conceivable. The parish beadle had long been driven by terror from visiting its precincts; the policeman referred to the locality with foreboding winks and uneasy gestures; and even the parish doctor, ever since he had been attacked on one of his visits, because he had prohibited a patient suffering under delirium from taking perpetual doses of gin and bitters, had regarded the Row with feelings of considerable doubt and uncertainty.

Oak-Apple Row was, in fact, a metropolitan eye-sore. Oak-Apple Row was one of those places that everybody said ought to be abolished. It was an outrageous nuisance and a crying evil. Improvement Acts, Nuisance-Prevention Acts, Building Reform Acts, kept on passing Session after Session, but where they passed to, or what they passed for, no one seemed to understand—for there was Oak-Apple Row still unaffected, undestroyed, seething and stewing, in all its original uncleanli-

ness and wretchedness. Vestries of corpulent men stormed about it, and made powerful speeches concerning its miseries and the miseries of its inhabitants. Humane individuals, with white cravats and bald heads, whose "political capital" was the Sanitary Reform and Metropolitan Improvement cry, in their lectures upon these subjects before Literary Institutions and Scientific Associations, always dragged forth Oak-Apple Row in evidence of, and illustration to, their arguments; and when the statistical information was furnished as to how many distinct and different families nightly slept in the same cellar—when sectional plans of the interiors, and highly-coloured views of the exteriors of the houses in Oak-Apple Row were exhibited, the statements and the pictures were sure to produce an amount of applause that the description of no other locality could secure. The newspapers, too, gave graphic statements concerning Oak-Apple Row; and one popular novelist had written a forcible account of the peculiarities of the purlieus, and, to crown all, had made an absconding felon cut his own throat in the second-floor-front of No. 6, an incident which, although it never had happened, drew more public attention towards the ill-fated locality than all the legislators, orators, vestry boards, and lecturers had been able conjointly to excite.

It was the *coup de grace* to Oak-Apple Row, and

this was how it was accomplished. Mr. Cyrus Piffin was a good specimen of one of the London public, he was a round amiable man, with frizzly hair, and a good tempered expression of countenance. He was firm in character—philanthropic in disposition—speculative in ideas—rich in pocket—active in habits—a strong lover of justice—a hater of oppression—an occasional victim to humbug—and proud of his metropolis! In his time he had adorned the jury box, and the vestry room—he had been "observed upon the platform" as the newspapers say, at many an indignation meeting or election—and he had filled the chair at many a parochial and civic board, both of business and festivity. After years of the feverish life of a citizen and a nurseryman, he had, by a strict attention to his own business in preference to other people's, been able, on his fiftieth anniversary, to retire from his occupation on a comfortable independence, and instal himself in a neat little house, with grounds attached, somewhere near Hampstead; where, as he was fond of gardening, he intended to enjoy the *otium cum dig.* for the remainder of his mortal career. He was a bachelor; and fortune, with that remarkable fickleness for which she has been always celebrated, had showered her fruits upon him with a lavish hand, although he was, perhaps, the last man in the world who required them, and, perhaps, the very first who would be rendered miserable by their acquisition.

No sooner had he made his own fortune, than a miserly uncle, whom he had never seen but twice in his life, and then only to lend him, at his earnest solicitation, an odd guinea or so, died in a garret at Mile End, leaving him the sole possessor of another fortune. It was difficult at first for Mr. Cyrus Piffin to believe this strange disposition of events; but the amount of valuable personalty and realty of which he found himself the owner, would have soon removed all doubts from a mind even more sceptical than Mr. Piffin's. Amongst the property to which he thus unexpectedly became entitled were the whole of the houses on one side of Oak-Apple Row—property of that description which, like a beneficial interest in a Chancery suit, everybody is better without. It is, perhaps, unnecessary to say that the inhabitants scorned to pay any rent for the occupation of the tenements: but this interesting fact did not, in any way, relieve Mr. Piffin, in the eye of the law, from all the responsibilities and liabilities attaching to the houses in the Row, as if he were the identical tenant of each individual messuage; and it was after some indignant member of the public, who had read the popular novelist's incident before referred to, had threatened Mr. Piffin with an indictment, which, in the eyes of the little bachelor, was assimilated with a trial at the Central Criminal Court, forfeiture of property, and transportation for natural life, that the policy of demolishing Oak-Apple Row, and

erecting a street of model houses, entered the imagination of our retired horticulturist. The germ of the idea being once planted in his mind, it did not require much nourishing, before it became fully developed. The engagement of an architect and surveyor was the first fruit produced, and that gentleman immediately took upon himself to manifest upon paper, that the place might be converted into a perfect elysium. That gentleman soon furnished Mr. Piffin with his pictorial ideas upon the matter, and the plan of the beautiful little row of six roomed houses, with the steps leading up to the unexceptionable front doors in brown, with knockers and bellpulls in chróme, with chimney-pots in strict regularity and very best dragon's blood, with bright windows in prussian blue, catching the reflection of the light so charmingly, with fine white blinds, and tassels attached all falling down to an exact level on the panes, and straight and orderly railings in green in front of the kitchen windows, with ingeniously designed architraves of the doors, and ornamental work over the windows; all this—to say nothing of the fancy exhibited in inserting round the houses, a number of small sticks with conical tops in very bright green, supposed to represent trees, made up as pretty a picture as the eye of the most metropolitan reformer could wish to contemplate. Mr. Piffin might be excused if he doubted whether such a very wonderful representation of artistic talent as the architect's plan exhibited, could be carried out

in a brick and mortar realisation; but he was soon undeceived, for contracts were advertised for, and there was quite a rush of builders with tenders, whose greatest anxiety in life appeared to be, that Mr. Piffin should not pay one farthing more than he ought; and who were all in the greatest commotion and excitement amongst themselves as to who should perform the intended work for the least possible profit. Of course, as in all such cases, one lucky individual had the good fortune to tender for a lower sum than anybody else, and, of course, Mr. Piffin was congratulated by the architect upon the happy bargain he had made, and, of course, the unhappy builder became immediately impressed with doubts as to whether he could do it for the amount he had named, and all the other builders, whose tenders had been refused, were morally convinced that he would go through Portugal Street in consequence of his rashness. However, be this as it may, the work was proceeded with according to the plans, the sticks with the green tops omitted, and passing over any description of the incidents and events consequent upon the demolition of the Row, which would lead us too far from our subject, let us be content with saying, and the reader content with knowing, that with the aid of the silver trowel and golden spade, even a modern augean stable can be cleansed, and that Oak-Apple Row began to rise like a new Phœnix from its ashes.

CHAPTER II.

As an invariable rule, whenever we lay down plans, whether of life, conduct, or building, which we intend scrupulously and religiously to follow, the very first thing we are almost sure to do, is to depart from them, and therefore Mr. Piffin's plan, and the architect's plan, were, by no means, so devoutly followed as had been intended, and the new houses, although they were undeniably excellent, were very generally admitted to look somewhat better upon paper. However, be this as it may, a row of prettier or more model houses could not have been seen anywhere for a circuit of some miles, and the previous inhabitants of the locality thronged into their old street, and literally hurrahed on the eventful day when the last scaffolding poles were taken down, and the model tenements disclosed to their astonished gaze. Talk about luxuries of the rich, indeed! Each house had six rooms, and a back yard, a stove in each apartment, and a copper in the washhouse, windows that opened and shut, and a cellar for the coals; besides the water came in quite regularly, and there were ornamental window sills, door knockers of ravenous lions, and chimney pots, like militia shakos.

Mr. Piffin, surveying his new property, felt no

small gratification and delight. He slept sounder at night, he rattled his watch seals in a graver key when he walked; and, as he had an inward conviction that he had benefitted the human race, and his own income, his personal character rose in his own estimation accordingly. It was a favourite practice with Mr. Piffin to drive his bachelor friends down to Oak-Apple Row in his gig, and show them over his property; and it was a matter of observation, that every friend who made the inspection uttered the same remark, to wit, that he (the friend) should not mind living in one of the houses himself, which was always received by the delighted landlord with much satisfaction, and afforded him encouragement as to their letting well and speedily.

"Ah! sir, they'll soon let, you take my word for that," was the accustomed prophesy of Mr. John Scriggs, the agent to Mr. Piffin, whenever the subject of letting came upon the *tapis*. "You'll see, sir, when the bills go up, we shall have the population mad to become tenants. I know the population's instincts, sir, and their 'fection for coal cellars and cisterns. They're luxuries they don't find every day, I can tell you."

"Well, Mr. Scriggs," was the usual reply of Mr. Piffin, "you will recollect I let to none but yearly tenants, and of undoubted respectability, and £28 per annum, exclusive of taxes, is the rent I require."

"And cheap too," says Mr. Scriggs; "you leave the houses to me, I'll manage 'em, sir."

Mr. Scriggs was the house agent, and also the house warmer, for directly a house in the Row was finished, Mr. Scriggs was forthwith put into it, and commenced some mysterious process of warming it, not by giving evening parties, or conducting festivities usually denominated as house warmings, but by the employment of an evidently more disagreeable method, which entailed a vast consumption of coke, and decorated Mr. Scriggs with a perpetual coat of very black dust. Mr. Scriggs was consequently the present and sole occupier of the four houses that were completed. And a very exciting time he had of it, as may well be imagined; for what with repeated applications at each and every of the houses by persons wishing to tenant the same, and what with run-away knocks and delusive rings, all of which Mr. Scriggs had separately and individually to answer, besides having to attend to all the watercocks, cisterns, flues, and warmings in the various houses, he had but little leisure to pursue any other of his numerous avocations, or to seek relaxation in the bosom of his family circle. Mr. Scriggs resided in a neighbouring street, and his home was principally distinguished by a profusion of small children, a large wife, a dirty back parlour with a profound smell of cooking, and a very dark shop, containing a

quantity of old furniture, the prominent features of which were a baby's chair and a piece of theatrical scenery. Over the door he informed the world that he beat carpets, recovered rent, and made distraints, and underneath a painting of a moon-light view of a retiring one-horse waggon, loaded with three chairs, a bootjack, and a clock case, he stated that he removed goods in town or country. In personal appearance Mr. Scriggs was short and dusty. In disposition Scriggs was a timid man; but proud and jealous of his profession and its attendant duties. He conceived himself also gifted with a species of second sight which enabled him to prophesy coming events, and he was a perfect Zad-kiel in his ingenuity in reconciling the event as it occurred with the totally contrary prediction he had uttered. He was also particularly liable to accident, and this circumstance afforded a clue to the origin of the decorations he possessed of two scars on the forehead, a nose much flatter in its shape than that designed by nature for his use, and the more temporary facial adornments he invariably exhibited of a species of potichomanie in sticking plaister. He had a stammering, whispering, star-ing, diffident, trembling manner, that made him always look as if he had been suddenly un-buried, and as if he were not quite certain in his own mind that you were not aware of the fact, and were not going to knock him down in consequence.

Whatever were Mr. Scriggs' personal defects and peculiarities, his energy and devotion in his employer's cause were undoubted; and these were soon exemplified, in the fact, that a tenant was, after some weeks' announcements, inquiries, bickerings, rejections, and general exertions, secured for No. 1. The fortunate applicant was a Mr. Pinkers, a furrier by trade, and of undoubted respectability. His appearance was unexceptionable, his references, a grocer at Mile End, and a lady residing in Tottenham Court Road, in the candle and firewood line, of undeniable solvency and social elevation; and accordingly Mr. Pinkers took possession for a year of No. 1.

"This is an excellent commencement," said Mr. Piffin, rubbing his hands; "a capital tenant this."

"Ah, sir, you leave them to me," said Mr. Scriggs with a prophetic wink; "I'll manage 'em, sir."

And it really seemed as if his prophecy were this time about to be fulfilled, for the very next day after the tenant of No. 1 had satisfactorily ensconced himself and his household effects in the new house, a most ladylike widow-woman, in black silk, and with a smile of bewitching sweetness, made application for, and then went over No. 2, where she inspected everything most minutely and cautiously, asking Mr. Scriggs so many questions that they would have filled six volumes of Pinnock's

Catechisms, or one Parliamentary Blue Book, if they had been taken down. She then desired to see the landlord, and in the interview that followed soon won the good graces of Mr. Piffin by her touching candour and graceful amiability. Of course she was a "lonely widow"—was there ever a widow that was not a "lonely one?" and of course she required certain little alterations and additions made in No. 2, which of course were agreed to, and then she consented to take No. 2, at £28 per annum, "purvising" she had an agreement in writing to that effect.

"You will, no doubt, excudge me, sir, making so bold," said the widow woman, Mrs. Crimpley, sipping a glass of sherry which Mr. Piffin had conferred on her, "you will excudge me, but my poor dear departed husband—which is dead, buried, and gone—had a deal to do with houses and tenants, and he found 'em turn out very, very bad when they was let in without having it in black and white; so, rather than you should think me capable of dishonesty, I am determined to have it in black and white. 'Black and white,' was my poor husband's fav'rite say. 'Black and white,' says he, 'Maria; there's nothing in this here world like black and white!'"

Mrs. Crimpley had an agreement accordingly, and Mrs. Crimpley went into No. 2.

If it be true that misfortunes are never in the

disjunctive mood, it is equally certain fortunes are generally in the conjunctive, and seldom if ever visit us except in a copulative character. It was so with Mr. Piffin. Mr. Bloker, a decorator and paper-hanger, a strongly-built individual, with large whiskers and a strikingly curious expression in his left eye, which appeared to be always endeavouring to look behind his left ear, and with a very thin emaciated wife, was let into possession of No. 3, at the same rent as the other tenants. He also was a most respectable man, only unfortunately his references were not quite so satisfactory as those of the other tenants: for when Mr. Scriggs called upon the referees, he found one of them, a master builder at Brixton, was absent in the country engaged in erecting a cathedral, and the other, a publican at Edmonton, was labouring under *delirium tremens*, and lying upstairs with his head shaved.

As for the shop at the corner (No. 4), that was let to Mr. and Mrs. Gimple and family. Mr. Gimple being a stout man, wearing a broad-brimmed hat and his hair curled into little bundles of corkscrews; Mrs. Gimple being a small woman, with a squeaking voice, a peaky nose, and general masculine habits; and the family being a wild, stunted assortment of three small male Gimples and two small female Gimples. The Gimple family was in the retail chandlery line; and, previous to taking the shop, the heads of the family occupied a whole morning

in debating and arguing with Mr. Piffin as to whether the rent should be £29 17s. or £30 per annum, a contest which was eventually decided in favour of the landlord, consequent upon that gentleman judiciously plying each of his antagonists with a glass of old port and a cracknal biscuit.

If it had been a source of gratification to Mr. Piffin to see his model-houses completed, it can, with the greatest facility, be imagined how much his delight was increased, when he beheld his houses in the occupation of such respectable, straightforward, industrious tenants. For a long time, Mr. Piffin made it one of his most pleasurable employments to drive to Oak-Apple Row, and contemplate his handiwork. On which occasions Mr. Scriggs would take the opportunity to triumphantly describe the very successful manner in which he had realised his prophecy of managing the houses, and enter into further predictions concerning the other tenements then in progress of completion. Mrs. Crimpley, the widow woman at No. 2, had quite won Mr. Piffin's heart by putting up curtains, and hanging a canary-bird in a brass cage in the front parlour window. The chandlers' shop appeared to be thriving; and Mrs. Gimple had been heard to affirm that they should do remarkably well when they had laid in a little more stock, and the demands of the neighbourhood were better understood.

"You see, sir," said Mr. Gimple in explanation, "it is difficult to arrive at tastes of localities. Some localities is passionately fond of pickles; others exhibits a preference for lamp black and walking-sticks; whilst others, again, appears to confine theirselves to bread and cheese and shuttle-cocks."

Mr. Pinkers, also, was most conciliatory and honourable in his behaviour; and Mr. Piffin was so delighted with Mrs. Pinkers, when she exhibited to him the identical teapot, which she had made the receptacle of her savings in order to meet the quarter's rent, that he at once presented the baby with a shilling. Mr. Bloker, too, was evidently progressing in his business, judging by the activity with which a boy, with a black face and an excited manner, was always going in and coming out of the house, generally bearing parcels under his arm.

For a long time this satisfactory state of things proceeded; but as quarter-day approached, Mr. Piffin began to experience that his pleasures of being a landlord were not quite unalloyed. No. 1 complained that the water would not come in, and that the house was not sufficiently warmed; so six sacks of coke were sent in, and Mr. Scriggs was ordered to correct the cistern, which he did, and nearly caught his death of cold in consequence, having inadvertently turned the water on himself before he could get out. Then the chimney of No. 2 would persist in smoking, and Mr. Scriggs, in

his endeavours to put matters right, made matters worse. Then Mr. Gimple, at the shop, wanted a door made through the wall of the back yard into a neighbouring street, in order, as he said, to be able to get his barrels of grocery into his establishment. And Mr. Bloker's proceedings were of so mysterious a character, that forebodings of an extremely unpleasant character floated disagreeably through Mr. Piffin's mind. It can well, therefore, be understood, that, as quarter-day approached, it was with no small feelings of gratification he looked forward to the arrival of that interesting period.

CHAPTER III.

ONE morning Mr. Piffin was seated in the little back parlour of his house at Hampstead, at the matutinal meal. He looked like a man who had passed a night free from uneasy dreams, and was about to pass the day as equally absent from unpleasant realities. He eat his toast with a gusto, his ham and eggs with a relish, and he sipped his coffee like a bee would a honey flower. He read the paper, too, with a confidence and an interest that showed the cares of the world fell but lightly on him; he did not glance, with a trembling gaze, down the list of bankrupts, or over the catalogue of deaths, or skim the money article or the price of shares with

dismal apprehensions; neither did he refer, with feverish haste, to the "Latest Intelligence;" nor greedily devour the opinion of Mr. Editor upon the leading topics; but he went calmly, boldly, and coolly through the whole wonderful history of the world's doings before him, with the air of a man who was perfectly satisfied with his own proceedings, and was not going to be affected by anybody else's. He digested the "decided fall in stocks" with the same equanimity that he perused the criticism on the last night's opera; and he was as much disturbed by the "Tremendous failure of Messrs. Jobbins and Kracker, the merchants," as he was by the announcement in the second column, that "If X. Y. Z. did return home, he wouldn't hear much to his advantage." In this delightful state of composure, however, he only imitated nature, as represented out of doors on this particular occasion, for it was a delicious, soft spring morning; and Mr. Piffin's canary bird singing in its cage, and Mr. Piffin's very hairy Skye terrier snoosing in the hearth-rug, in common with their master, evidently derived gratification from the state of the barometer.

"Oh!" mused Mr. Piffin, falling back in his easy chair, and rattling the sovereigns and keys in his pockets, "Oh! to-morrow is the first quarter-day. At length I shall reap the fruits of my philanthropy to the poor—and my investment—good interest. Let me see—How much per cent?"

Mr. Piffin's mind was going off into an elaborate and pleasing calculation to ascertain by how much his balance at his banker's would be increased, by its previous decrease, and had already worked himself into such a state of numerical complication as to render the employment of his eighth finger and his two thumbs necessary, when the problem was suddenly erased from the tablets of his intellect by a violent ring at the garden bell, and the next instant Mr. Piffin was upon his legs, in some trepidation, and the very hairy Skye terrier was upon his legs, in a great state of barking and commotion, and evidently showing by the position he assumed, that he was quite prepared to receive the intruder, should that personage endeavour to effect his entrance under the door. A ring at the garden bell was by no means an extraordinary occurrence at Piffin Lodge; nor was Mr. Piffin a guilty man, nor a needy man, nor a nervous man, to be frightened from his propriety at such a very common-place circumstance; but this particular ring had a foreboding twang about it—the clapper seemed to speak with a peculiar accent of danger; the little iron tongue rattled out a quivering, clanging exclamation of coming evil. It appeared to give that instinctive warning which every man, who can boast a knocker or a bell, must have oftentimes experienced. It might be said to assimilate itself to that dreadful lumpy single knock, we have all so often heard at

our portals, and which instinctively sets us shivering. Who will say that those communicants with the outer world—the knocker and bell—have not voices; and who will dare to own that they have not spoken to him at times, in tones either for good or bad tidings, that cannot be mistaken?

A few moments' pause, a shuffling in the passage, the opening of the back parlour door, and Mr. Scriggs, hat in hand, with a face all beady with perspiration, and a contused eye, stood breathless before Mr. Piffin.

"Well, Mr. Scriggs, what's the matter?"

Mr. Scriggs having recovered his breath, and shaken the teeth of the hairy Skye terrier out of the heel of his boot, replied: "Perhaps you will have the goodness to remember, Mr. Piffin, how I told you it would be, a long time ago. You will recollect that I fully prophesied it. It's just as I thought, and it's just as I said"—

"What's the matter—Have the water-pipes burst?"

"Please to recollect, sir, that I told you how it would be;" and then, concentrating all his energy into one great mysterious whisper, he added—"They're gone!"

"What's gone?" said Mr. Piffin, in an agony of horror, "the water-pipes?"

"They began to run this morning," continued

Mr. Scriggs, in the same horrible whisper, "and they went off in a covered cart."

"The water-pipes in a covered cart! What do you mean, sir?"

"No, not the pipes," said Mr. Scriggs, mildly; "not the pipes, Mr. Piffin. Would it was no more; but the tenants, sir—the tenants."

Again Mr. Piffin said, "What do you mean?"

"The tenants of No. 1," continued Mr. Scriggs, becoming additionally beady on the upper lip; "the tenants of No. 1 have run away this morning, and taken their furnitur' in a covered cart, and not paid no rent."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Piffin, "Pinkers, the furrier, run away this morning. This is disgraceful. I never heard of such a thing;" and then, turning ferociously upon Mr. Scriggs, he continued: "A pretty fellow you are! What's the use of having you as an agent, I should like to know, to allow such a thing? Why didn't you stop them, sir? Why didn't you drag them, cart and all, before a court of justice? Eh, sir!"

"I did try to stop 'em," stammered Mr. Scriggs, "but Pinkers had all the things out of the house and into the cart, before you could have said 'Jack Robinson,' sir. I did capture the kitchen clock-case once, but Pinkers took it away again, and then I seized a clothes-horse, and, after a struggle, Pinkers got that, too."

"Well, well," muttered Mr. Piffin, impatiently, and walking about with great anger.

"Well, then, as there was no goods left, as a last resource, I distrained on the baby, and stated to Pinkers that I should hold him until payment of the rent, vereupon Mrs. Pinkers said no rent was due, and I couldn't lawfully distrain at all, and with that 'ere remark, sir, she forcibly took the levy out of my possession, knocked me down the kitchen stairs with a hiron fender, and when I recovered my eyesight I'm blowed if the cart, Pinkers, baby, and furnitur', wern't all gone together!"

"This is a pretty commencement, upon my word," exclaimed Mr. Piffin, turning to the bell and pulling it with a vigour of several horse-power. The boy of the establishment—a very thin boy, with a prominent upper lip—made so expeditious an appearance into the room, and with such a very sudden jerk, that it seemed as if the action of the bell wires had forcibly dragged him up stairs into the presence of his master.

"Quick," said Mr. Piffin, "my hat, coat, and boots—make haste. Tell Robert to get the gig out. I'll trounce the rascal Pinkers—the ungrateful, the unprincipled scoundrel. After six sacks of coke, too, and every domestic convenience."

"Which coke," suggested Mr. Scriggs, adding fuel to the fire already raging in the breast of the landlord, "I have ascertained Pinkers disposed of to

a greengrocer in the next street, at the rate of sixpence per sack."

"Is it possible?" said that gentleman, as the boy, who had jerked out of the room, now jerked in again with Mr. Piffin's articles of attire, and, in a trembling condition of body, assisted his master to assume them. "Is it possible—the deceitful villain. Talk of deceit! Only think, Mr. Scriggs, the deception of that cursed tea-pot, which was to hold the rent! I could have forgiven him the rent; but any man would be disgusted with a being who could make a tea-pot the instrument of his villanies."

As Mr. Piffin enunciated these expressions, and many more in a similar strain, he struggled and gasped into his boots and coat, undergoing much unnecessary exertion and violence of body in the operation, consequent upon the volcanic state of his temperament. Pulling on your boots in a rage is by no means an easy or pleasant process; but when the performance is attempted by a plethoric individual, it becomes decidedly dangerous. However, Mr. Piffin survived the process; and the gig, having been already in a state of preparation for the landlord's accustomed drive, was now at the door. Mr. Scriggs scrambled in, Mr. Piffin assumed his seat and took the reins, and, with a vicious flinch at the pony's ear, which made that animal start off at an adjoining gate in an uncommonly murderous man-

ner, they disappeared down the road; whilst the boy Timkins, who had been jerking about nervously during the preparations for departure, as if he had been a fantoccini puppet, jerked back again into the house, and commenced feeding his rabbits.

When Mr. Piffin arrived on the scene where the incidents narrated by Mr. Scriggs had been enacted, the first thing on which his eyes rested, in dismal but angry contemplation, was the deserted No. 1. There it was, affording a subject for melancholy regard, tenantless and abandoned; and if its recent occupier had been a criminal of the blackest dye, the interest in its aspect, on the part of the neighbourhood, could not have been greater or more decided. A crowd was collected round its doorway, gossiping, gesticulating, and pointing at its windows and down the street. A cloud of boys were gratifying their appetite for excitement and mystery by knocking terrific double knocks at the door, and peeping through the chinks of the closed shutters; whilst the straws, the only mementos that the absconder had left behind him, were flying about, and had lodged themselves upon all the ledges and projections that the house afforded for their reception. The inhabitants of the other tenements in the street were looking upon the scene from their windows; and several exciting conversations, concerning the particulars of the escape, were being carried on,

from window to window, across the street; and evidently, by the laughter they provoked, contributing highly to the diversion of both speakers and listeners.

As soon as Mr. Piffin and Mr. Piffin's gig came in sight, a loud cry of "Here's the landlord!" burst from the assembled multitude. It was a perfect pæan of joy, flavoured with a strong relish of anticipated gratification. The gig pulled up, and Mr. Piffin and Mr. Scriggs descended; whilst the whole of the boys made a fierce rush at the pony's head, with the intention of holding him, exhibiting their usual great consideration in this respect for the public safety, and their extensive doubts of every animal's tractability. This demonstration of public feeling, however, the pony indignantly repelled by violently kicking the splashboard, and butting fiercely at his tormentors, a course of proceeding that called forth many cries of pain from some of his would-be guardians, and many cries of "Wo-a!" from everybody, The pony being quieted and given in charge of three of the biggest boys, our landlord and his agent approached the miserable tenement, and the first person they met was Mrs. Crimpley, the widow of No. 2, who encountered them with a melancholy aspect, almost bordering upon sniffing.

"Good morning, ma'am," said Mr. Piffin.

"Good morning, sir," returned the widow.

"So, Mrs. Crimpley," said Mr. Piffin, "it seems your neighbours have acted most dishonestly, and absconded without paying their rent!"

"Yes, sir," said the widow; "more shame to 'em. They went off this morning, sir, in a covered cart. Says I to 'em, says I (when I seed the straws flying about I knew at once which way the wind blew), 'you ought to be ashamed of yourselves,' says I, 'running away without paying your rent. I'd sooner carve cats-meat, or sell cresses three bunches for a halfpenny in the public streets, all my life, than serve my landlord so!'"

"I am well aware of that, Mrs. Crimpley; you are indeed an honest tenant!"

"Yes, sir, and you'll find me so; there's nothing like black and white, sir, to keep people in the straight line."

"Please, sir, you'll perhaps recollect what I said; it's all come true!" said Mr. Scriggs, who had been examining the door with a scrutiny so close and cautious, that it seemed as if he had been about to extract a tooth from the keyhole; "they've taken the keys with them, and we can't get into the house!"

"Which way did the cart go?" inquired Mr. Piffin loudly. "Who saw the cart go?"

"It went in the d'rection of Vhitechapel," said a blear-eyed mechanic in a paper cap, made out of a very old number of the *Weekly Dispatch.*

"You knows a lot about it, you do!" said an old woman, without a bonnet and with a broom. "I seed it go; it went as if it wos goin' to Regency Park, and it's Stiggers' wan; I knows the wan well; it's the werry wan that me and my old man, together with Mrs. Slop and others, went to 'Ampton Vick in."

"Oh, if you please, sir," cried a boy, bursting in amongst the group almost breathless, "I've followed the wan, sir; I knows where it's gone to."

"Do you, my man," said Mr. Piffin. "Lead the way, I'll follow you. I'm determined to find them; and I'll make an example of their dishonesty."

This was said very loud, and with much force of action, by Mr. Piffin, in order that, in case any of the other tenants should hear him, they might take it as a hint, and form their private opinions as to whether he was to be trifled with or not.

"Scriggs," continued he, giving that person some copper coins, "reward the boy that held the pony, and take the gig home. Go on, my man."

"All right," said the boy; "I knows the way; you follow me, gov'nor; I knows a short cut."

"Ain't yo'er goin' to stand anything," said the mechanic in the newspaper cap, as Mr. Piffin and his conductor moved away.

"There's a shabby lot," said the old woman with the broom. "I hope he may lose his rent."

"Y'ar," said the lookers on generally.

"Harrah!" said the boys, as they fought round Mr. Scriggs for the possession of the coppers, each one asserting himself to be the individual who had performed the service of preventing the pony from running away. The wretched Mr. Scriggs struggled and puffed, and expostulated, eventually throwing the coins into the middle of the road, where they were scrambled for apparently by the whole neighbourhood, and during which proceeding he jumped into the vehicle, and, in company with the pony, happily escaped.

Mr. Piffin's guide was an active boy, small, but sharp, and rather more ragged and uncertain in his attire than the season of the year would have rendered comfortable to any other boy uninured to the hardships of a London street life. He seemed to be impressed with a desire to exhibit to Mr. Piffin his knowledge of locality, and to give him a due insight into some of the architectural and archæological mysteries of the metropolis. The first thing he did after he had cleared Oak-Apple Row, was to plunge down a court, out of which he issued into a yard, then he rushed like a whirlwind into another court, then down a very dark alley, coming out suddenly into a broad thoroughfare, and crossing which, with the speed of lightning, to the horror of Mr. Piffin, under the belly of a passing brewer's horse, he dashed wildly into what seemed a door-

way of a pawnbroker's shop, but which, in reality, was another court; then he went through a string of alleys, round corners, in between posts, out again in a twinkling into small deserted squares without any apparent outlet, ultimately emerging (to the no small amazement of our landlord, who conceived himself adjacent to some very distant suburb) all amongst the pens of Smithfield market.

"Stop a minute, my man," gasped Mr. Piffin, pulling off his hat, and sitting upon one of the wooden gates of the pens, in order to rest his weary legs, and recover his breath, "stop a minute—you really go so very fast, that I feel it quite a task to keep up with you."

"Keep the pot a bilin', old boy," rejoined the hopeful guide, whilst he, too, climbed on to the top of one of the wooden posts, and sat contemplating the exhausted figure of Mr. Piffin with a species of impish glee. "Can you do a 'hover?' come, you must try if you can't follow me, old chap;" and the next minute the vagabond was springing over the wooden pens like a human grasshopper. Mr. Piffin attempted to follow him by running in and out of the gates of the pens; and what with some gates being shut, and the difficulty of opening them, and the concussions his shins received in the attempt, the chase became most bewildering and distressing. At length, however, they both emerged into an open space, evidently prepared to receive an assort-

ment of houses, but which, at present, was protected by wooden barriers, and surrounded by very debilitated looking tenements, leaning upon crutches. Here several parties of boys were enjoying the refreshing games of "rounders" and "tip cat," and the no less exciting and exhilarating amusement of dodging the police, who endeavoured to curb their too confirmed a tendency for out o' door entertainment and exercise. Mr. Piffin had some difficulty in restraining his guide from joining in a side at a game of rounders, and after receiving the rounder ball in the small of his back, a tip cat on his third waistcoat button, a shout of laughter from everybody, and a desire from an approaching policeman that he would "move on," our landlord cleared the space, in company with his attendant imp; a few more paces up an adjoining street, and then, to Mr. Piffin's great satisfaction and relief, the impish boy came to a stand still at the entrance of a not very inviting looking thoroughfare.

"Here we are, old boy," said the imp, "this here's the street where the wan went to. Number sixteen's the house. They'll be sure and tell you it did'nt come there when you inquire, but don't you stand no nonsense."

"Thank goodness," murmured our landlord, "we've arrived at last. Here, my man, here's a shilling for you."

"Thankye, old boy. Don't stand no nonsense. To be sure there is desperate characters now down that there street, but don't be afeared, and if you shows fight they'll soon knock under." And with these suggestions and remarks, the impish guide gave a peculiarly prolonged and unearthly yell—a yell which, for singularity of expression and hideousness of tone, is known to be only uttered in common by London street boys, and mentally distressed hyenas —and disappeared.

The street into which Mr. Piffin now entered was, as we have before remarked, by no means inviting. It was not the sort of street that any person with a fastidious taste, or who habitually wore patent boots, would select for an afternoon's stroll. It appeared to be principally composed of shops, and it seemed as if an alarm of fire had, at some distant period, been given in the street, and that everybody had thereupon turned the contents of the whole of the houses into the road, and now would not give themselves the trouble to take them in again. Mr. Piffin threaded his way through the mass of articles exposed, it was presumed for sale, in front of the houses, and at length, by a judicious calculation of the number of tenements he had passed, stopped before No. 16. This was a shop in the rag and bottle line, and a huge black doll swung by the hair of its head like a female Absolon, over its principal entrance. Mr. Piffin entered the shop,

and not finding any one present to receive him, knocked on the counter with his knuckles.

"Hulloa!" said a voice of the deepest possible ferocity, from the interior of a small room, which apparently acted as the back parlour. Mr. Piffin waited a few moments, and nothing further having come from the room, save the voice referred to, knocked again.

"Hulloa!" said the voice, in an accent of the most savage impatience, and the next instant a big man rushed from the back parlour into the shop, struck the counter a fearful blow with a stick he carried, and then, glaring at Mr. Piffin with great anger, exclaimed, "Now, what the devil is it?"

This form of introduction was anything but agreeable to our landlord's nerves, and the personal appearance of the proprietor was but ill calculated to allay the feelings of agitation the emphatic character of the interrogative had given rise to in his breast. He was a repulsive-looking, big man, wearing an old white hat that came down to his eyebrows, a large neckerchief that came up to his nose, and a great coat that went down to his heels; the part of his face that was visible was quite sufficient to afford anybody that saw it the negative gratification that they could not see any more than they did; and Mr. Piffin would, perhaps, have been more satisfied if the bottle proboscis, the puffy cheeks,

and the swivel gray eyes that were now before him, had been also concealed from his view.

"Now, what the devil is it?" said the big man, petulantly.

"Well," stammered Mr. Piffin, "I believe Mr. Pinkers is here; and it's a little private matter, on which I wish to see him personally."

"Well, why couldn't you say so 'afore," growled the man, "without making all this row in the house. Why couldn't you behave as other gem'men do. Now, what is it?"

"I want to see Mr. Pinkers."

"Now, don't be such a hobstinate old party, don't," said the big man, striking his stick on the counter again. "You really ought to know better. Don't you know I'll attend to it for you. Don't you know I'm Pinkers' pardner. Don't you know I'm Huggs." And with that Mr. Huggs gave his visitor a familiar poke with his bludgeon in the ribs.

"Oh!" said Mr. Piffin, when he recovered his breath. "Oh! if you're Pinkers' partner that alters the case."

"Well, don't I tell you I am," shouted Mr. Huggs; and down came the bludgeon again on the counter. "Come to the point at once—What can I do for you?"

"Well," began Mr. Piffin, "I don't want to be hard upon Pinkers, because he has got a wife and a family."

"Now, that's kind on you," said Mr. Huggs; "that's wery kind on you. I thought you was a decent old party directly I saw you; but we don't take any advantage at this shop. We don't want any kindnesses here; we gives our price—and no more nor no less."

"I don't understand, however," continued Mr. Piffin, mildly, "why he should abscond."

Mr. Huggs smiled grimly and winked sternly, and then said: "Lor, what a hobstinate old party you are, to be sure. Don't you know that we must abscond? Don't you know that? But come, my old gallows bird, what have you got to sell at our fence?"

"Sell!" exclaimed Mr. Piffin, in accents of horror, "What do you mean?"

"Mean!" thundered Mr. Huggs, rattling the bludgeon on the counter, with a startling emphasis. "Mean! Don't you know what I mean? Don't you know you've come here with some articles you've found to sell? Is it lead off a church, or an old woman's cruet-stand? I'm Pinkers' partner, I tell you again. I'm Huggs."

"Articles I've found!" muttered Mr. Piffin, in great fear. "No such thing, sir. I've called for my quarter's rent, less income-tax. Pinkers ran away without paying me! I'm Mr. Piffin, the landlord!"

The appearance of Mr. Huggs at this announce-

ment, became perfectly startling. He fixed his eyes upon Mr. Piffin with an expression in which the deepest curiosity was mingled with the most intense scorn, and still rattling his bludgeon, he whispered with a compressed energy that was only rendered more horrible by the accompaniment of a savage sickly smile :—

"So you've called for your rent, have you?" Mr. Piffin shivered. "And," hissed Mr. Huggs, interrogatively, "and you expects to get it?"

Mr. Piffin continued to shiver.

"Do you see this?" said Mr. Huggs, with solemnity, and with an emphatic gentleness rubbing the top of his bludgeon on the tip of Mr. Piffin's nose—"Do you see this?" Mr. Piffin's fears almost blinded his vision; but his silence being accepted by Mr. Huggs as an affirmative answer that he was conscious of the existence of the instrument alluded to, that gentleman went on: "How dare you come here for your rent? Didn't you make my poor pardner, Pinkers, pay £28 per annum for your cussed house, eh?—Didn't you?"

"Put down that weapon, sir," interrupted Mr. Piffin. "Mr. Pinkers never paid any rent at all, and he had every comfort, and six sacks of coke!"

"Comfort and coke!" roared Mr. Huggs, flourishing his stick. "Don't talk to me in that way. What do you mean by comfort and coke? Now, I tell you what it is, you are not coming here to pry into

the secrets of our trade with impunity; you are not going to be a spy upon our actions."

At this moment Mr. Huggs was interrupted by a head protruding from the back parlour, and an exclamation proceeding from the head of "Give it him well, Huggs. Give it him."

"Oh! there he is," cried Mr. Piffin, in great anger; "there he is, Pinkers, the villain."

"Be off!" roared Huggs.

"Be off!" echoed Pinkers.

Mr. Piffin considered for a moment; and perhaps Falstaff's aphorism, that "the better part of valour is discretion," was never more appropriately applied than in this instance. Mr. Piffin took to his heels. His flight, however, only served to instigate Messrs. Pinkers and Huggs to pursuit. The rumour spread like lightning through the street, that a spy had been discovered, and the circumstance of an elderly and portly gentleman, running at full speed, served but to substantiate the intelligence, and draw forth the marked indignation of the inhabitants. Hurrahs and groans resounded, windows were thrown up, men and women rushed out of their tenements and endeavoured to stop the progress of our hero; missiles and execrations flew after his retreating form; but, eventually, after several severe struggles, and suffering much injury to his attire and personal appearance, Mr. Piffin emerged into the neighbouring street, and, having

placed himself in the custody of two members of the police force, was conducted to a cab, and arrived home very late at night, depressed in mind, torn in attire, and exhausted in body.

CHAPTER IV.

The next morning Mr. Piffin laid in bed very late indeed. Twelve o'clock had struck, and had found our hero alternately groaning and snoosing to ease his troubled mind and exhausted frame. With perhaps an excess of solicitude, his considerate housekeeper had already furnished the mantel-piece with an array of physic bottles, and some sticky-looking leeches were shivering in a saucer, every now and then raising their heads in a melancholy and appealing manner, as if they longed for the period when they should be fastened on their victim. Mr. Piffin, however, continued to groan, and then to go to sleep and snore; then to wake up and groan, and then to go to sleep and snore again; and, as the malady did not exhibit any further or more dangerous symptoms, it was a matter of some doubt in the mind of the patient's nurse when venesection ought to be commenced.

It was during one of the patient's most violent snoring spasms, and when the trumpet-like melody being performed but too surely told of the raging

emotions in the sleeper's breast, that a gentle knock was heard at the bedroom door. Mrs. Meek, with a glance of sympathy at her master's face, lest the noise should arouse him, stole softly to the door and opened it gently, uttering a small "Hist," as a warning to the intending intruder.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Meek, holding the door just sufficiently open to receive her nose, and peering into the passage.

"I wants to see Mr. Piffin," returned a voice in an energetic tremble. "It's just as I said it would be."

"Mr. Piffin's very ill," whispered Mrs. Meek, "very ill indeed; he has been nearly murdered by thieves; he can't see anybody to-day; he is suffering dreadfully."

A rush of sound like the blast of the trumpets of Jericho greeted the listener's ears, confirming the statement of the speaker.

"I can't help that," pursued the inquirer outside the door. "I must see him; it's just as I said; and I must see him."

Mrs. Meek was about to urge further reasons against the desired interview, when the sufferer enunciated a nasal note of such fearful produndity, that its force shook him into wakefulness; and the next moment he started up in bed, and exclaimed, with an accent of nervous terror—"Who's that, Mrs. Meek? Don't let him in if it's Huggs. Send for the police."

"It's Mr. Scriggs, sir, who wants to see you."

"Let him come in," said Mr. Piffin, sinking back reassured, and commencing a groan in a treble key.

Thus commanded, Mrs. Meek opened the door, and Mr. Scriggs presented himself at the bedside of his much suffering master.

"It's just as I said," began the agent, in a wheezing, hoarse tone of voice, that showed he was labouring under a cold in the head of sufficient unpleasantness; "it's just as I said, sir; but I am sorry to see you in such a state."

"Don't talk about it, Mr. Scriggs," groaned Mr. Piffin. "Pinkers was nothing more nor less than a receiver of stolen goods. They attacked me, Mr. Scriggs; and it's a mercy I'm alive to tell the tale—oh!"

"Well, sir" said Mr. Scriggs, restricting a rising sneeze and letting it off inside his head, an operation which shook him to a perfectly electrical extent, and produced a sodden, explosive, fizzing sort of sound, "well, sir, I effected an entrance into No. 1, and found that Pinkers had taken all the brass and hiron that he could lay hands on all over the house. He's taken up the pipes, sir, and he's taken off all the door-handles, and most of the locks, sir; and he's not only done that, sir, but he's actually cut the cock off the cistern—"

"What!" shouted Mr. Piffin.

"He's cut the cock off the cistern," pursued Mr. Scriggs emphatically, "and the consequence is that the water's run on without impediment into the kitchen; and they do say, in the street, that somebody's child, that got down the hairy for his ball, has been drowned in the kitchen, and so I've left a man and a boy dragging for the body." Here Mr. Scriggs let off another pyrotechnical sneeze inside his head with terrible violence, and relapsed into silence.

"Heavens and earth," cried Mr. Piffin, "is it possible? What a horrible thief that Pinkers is! But an empty house, Mr. Scriggs, is better than a bad tenant; and we must put up with our first loss."

"Precisely what I always said," continued Mr. Scriggs; "but there's No. 2—"

At the mere mention of No. 2, and the suspicion of anything being wrong with that model tenement, Mr. Piffin gasped again. He eyed Mr. Scriggs deliberately for a few seconds, and then summoned sufficient courage to say, in a mild and affable manner, as if the intelligence to be conveyed to him could only be of the most pleasing nature, "Well, Mr. Scriggs, and what of No. 2?"

"Well, sir," returned the agent, "I quite agree with you that an empty house is better than a bad tenant; but we can't get him out—"

"Get him out—get who out?"

"I've been trying all the morning, sir, but stratagem's no use, and physicians' force is unreasonable, considering our respective vaits; and so there he is."

"Who is—what is—what do you mean—what are you talking about? Has anything happened to that excellent woman Mrs. Crimpley."

"Lor' bless you, sir," continued the agent, "it's not her—it's her under-tenant; he's broke a winder and taken possession; and there he is in for a year, 'under his agreement,' he says; 'black and white,' as he calls it. I never seed anything like it; but its just what I expected, and just as I said."

"What is the meaning of this?" gasped Mr. Piffin. "Where is Mrs. Crimpley, the widow woman?"

"Gone, sir," said Mr. Scriggs; "went this morning with the furnitur, as much as there was of it, and o' course paid no rent; and the man as has got in, says she underlet the place to him, and there he is. And as for her being a widder, she's no more a widder than you are: for she's not only the mother-in-law of Pinkers, but they do say that she's got two husbands alive, and one's a man with a ticket o' leave, and the other's a sneaksman, that's now in the House of Correction for attempting to hang hisself with garters."

The fit of groaning that here befell Mr. Piffin was something so bewildering, that Mrs. Meek had

already seized one of the black sticky animals, for the purpose of applying him, when the intended victim recovered; and, calmly addressing himself to Mr. Scriggs, continued—"And do you mean to say that a man is actually living in the house without furniture?"

"Nothing whatever, sir, except an empty tub and a pewter pot; there he is, smoking and drinking, and he declares he'll stop there for a year, just as he is, unless you give him a £10 note."

"I'll go down directly," exclaimed Mr. Piffin; "I'll go down and see about this; I'll make an example of somebody. Mrs. Meek, tell them to get the gig ready. I'll go down at once."

In vain Mrs. Meek urged that it would be death to our landlord to leave the house in his present condition. In vain she pointed to the physic and the sticky animals. Mr. Piffin was firm. If he died he would put matters right; he would go to his grave with the conviction that he had arranged affairs and punished somebody. Mrs. Meek was obliged to give way; and, upon her retirement from Mr. Piffin's apartment with Mr. Scriggs, she gave vent to her indignation against that personage, who contented himself with sneezing internally, and muttering at intervals that it was not at all to be wondered at, as it was just as he had prophesied.

Before an hour had elapsed, Mr. Piffin and Mr. Scriggs were in Oak-Apple Row. Alas! for the

vanity of all human hopes and speculations! No. 2 now appeared to-day no better than No. 1 had done yesterday. It presented, however, a more animated spectacle, for the whole of the windows and the door were thrown wide open, and, at the first-floor window, a man was sitting smoking a long pipe and singing uproariously, whilst some boys in the street were pelting him with cabbage-stalks.

Our landlord and his attendant mounted the stairs, and presented themselves to the new occupier of No. 2. He was a drunken-looking, shabby-genteel sort of individual, with a napless, greasy hat stuck jauntily on one side of his head, and a black stock, very much worn at the side, with a buckle to it behind, round his throat. The rest of his attire was a seedy, dewy species of black, the various buttons to which seemed generally in an expiring condition, and with but feeble threads did their offices, and retained the garments on their wearer. Altogether he was one of those fragrant, seething, pauper-genteel exotics, that seem to flourish exclusively in particular atmospheres, and may always be found either in an auction-room during a book sale, the passages of the police courts, the yards of debtors' prisons, or the back benches of the Insolvent Court.

"Well, upon my soul," said Mr. Piffin, regarding the present tenant with the deepest scorn, "you are a pretty fellow."

"I knows that 'ere," hiccoughed the fragrant man, "I knows that 'ere," and then he continued to sing, in a cracked, nasal tone, as if he had broken his nose when his voice had been inside it, "Loud roared the dreadful thunder—"

"Are you going out of this house?" said Mr. Piffin.

"No!"

"I'll make you."

The fragrant man snapped his fingers wildly in the air, and said "Pish!"

"This is my house, isn't it?" said Mr. Piffin.

"No: it's mine for a year; under the agreement to Anna Crimpley of the other part; I'm her under tenant; black and white; I knows the law; you can't frighten me; I'm the personal friend of John Doe and the bosom companion of Richard Roe, I am!"

"Pay me my rent then."

"I sha'nt," said the fragrant man, "the law allows you a remedy—which the law is very kind to do—you can distrain. 'There she lay—all the day.'"

"You shall rue this conduct sir," said Mr. Piffin, almost beside himself with anger, "I'll turn you out; do you suppose I build houses to be ruined in this way; you shall suffer for this."

"I tell you what it is," said the man of dew, "if you comes here committing assaults and trespasses

in this way, I'm blowed if I don't set my friends John and Richard on to you. I have only got to tip my friend John the wink, and he'll file a certiorari against you, and throw you, me, and the house, and the whole blessed lot of us into Chancery for the rest of our lives. 'The lightning flashed—a main.' By the bye, talking of mains, you'll be indicted, I can tell you, if you don't stop that water that's been running in the next house ever since yesterday."

"Just what I told you," chimed in Mr. Scriggs.

"Then you won't go out?" roared Mr. Piffin.

"Certainly not; an Englishman's house is his castle. I knows the law—John and Richard's my friends—so fire away!"

"You scoundrel," shouted Mr. Piffin. "You shall rue this, you vagabond."

"Halloa! halloa! gently, gently," urged the man of perfume and of law, puffing the smoke through his nostrils, "none of your slander, or, by George! I'll bring the matter before the Chancellor. I'll go to the jury upon a mandamus."

"Go to the ——." What Mr. Piffin would have said we will not write; suffice it to say, that his anger had reached its climax, and, under such circumstances, he rushed from the presence of the vagabond that had aroused his very excusable irritation. Mr. Piffin saw very well he had to deal with one of those curses to society—a rogue with a

smattering of law—and of all rogues in the world defend us from such. We have heard of a class of scamps who style themselves "Besters," and "Bouncers," and "Charley Pitchers," and whose depredations are committed by exercising their "gift of the gab" upon innocent and verdant victims; but the rogue who patters law to obtain his fraudulent ends is a vagabond infinitely inferior in the ranks of criminal status to any of these, as he not only swindles one victim, but he abuses a whole profession at the same time, and escapes punishment under the cloak of the law.

"I'll never give the scoundrel a sixpence," said Mr. Piffin, as he reached the street, where the crowd had considerably increased, under the expectation of some one being pitched out of the first floor window. A decided "Hurrah!" greeted the landlord on his re-appearance, and an elderly woman rushed forward, and exclaimed prophetically in Mr. Piffin's face, "Ah! you've nearly had a murder to answer for, you have. Everybody thought my poor child was drowned in the kitchen of the new house, and it's a mercy for you, it is, that he'd followed the dancing dogs, and lost hisself instead—that it is!"

"Please sir," said a boy, "I helped to bale the water out of No. 1, and was the very first to break all the kitchen windows to let in air."

"Please sir," said another, "I was the first to

fetch the fire-engines;" a popular remedy this fetching of fire-engines, and one which appears to be very generally adopted without the smallest regard to the emergency that has happened. We verily believe that, if another deluge were to take place, there would be found somebody who would fetch the fire-engines on the occasion.

"Scriggs," said Mr. Piffin, when they had cleared the street, "I sincerely wish I had never built the houses at all. They are turning out so bad; but I'll have that vagabond out."

Mr. Piffin went to the police-station, and laid his case before the inspector, a bald-headed gentleman, seated in a species of watchbox. That person hummed and ha'ad, and then referred him to the magistrate. Mr. Piffin accordingly went to the magistrate, and after waiting half the day in the lobby, and being taken first for a respectable embezzler who had surrendered to his bail, then for a respectable complainant who had been garrotted on the previous night, and was now come to prosecute, then for a respectable person who had lost his watch under mysterious circumstances, and then for a respectable individual who had been summoned for neglecting to consume his own smoke, eventually proved himself to be that well-known, elderly, and respectable gentleman, who is always, at the rising of the court, laying some singular or extraordinary case before the magistrate for his con-

sideration and advice. "Can't help you," said the magistrate, when he had heard the statement, blowing his nose on a very large pocket handkerchief, and speaking very rapidly, "I've no jurisdiction. No use coming here. You'd better consult some respectable solicitor. You'd better not commit a breach of the peace, that's all. Anything more, Mr. Blinks?" (to the chief clerk). "No. Good day." And the magistrate skipped away from the judgment-seat through a back door, and Mr. Piffin was hustled out of the court by the retiring mob of policemen, lawyers' clerks, lookers on, and reporters.

The respectable solicitor that Mr. Piffin consulted had offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and to him he accordingly hurried, where he was soon unbosoming his misfortunes for the third time that day. "And now," said Mr. Piffin, "I want to know how I am to get that scoundrel out?"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Brush, the legal adviser, with great gravity, and taking down a volume from his book-case, "the process is this: you will have to give the present tenant a half-year's notice to quit, expiring on a day corresponding to the time at which the tenancy commenced, no notice having been mentioned in the agreement; and you will then have to proceed by the action of ejectment, which, if the tenant defend, will take you about three months' more, and cost you about twenty to thirty guineas."

"What!" cried Mr. Piffin; "but the vagabond will let the house go to pieces."

"You can bring an action for dilapidations, if he commits any."

"And the rent?—there's nothing to distrain."

"You can bring an action for that, too!"

Mr. Piffin groaned.

"And as for No. 1," continued the imperturbable lawyer, turning the book open, "you have done very wrong in entering again in the way you did. You ought to have proceeded under the Vacant Possession Act, which would have cost you merely three guineas, or thereabouts, and taken scarcely a fortnight to effect.

"What! and leave the water running on all the time!" exclaimed Mr. Piffin.

"Scriggs," said our landlord, when they were in the gig again, driving away from the sanctum of the lawyer, "a pretty state of law this is, isn't it. Here is encouragement for the improvement of the tenements of the working-classes, when I am positively at the mercy of any rogue who gets possession of my houses. If the Legislature wants the metropolis improved, it ought to protect the landlords a little more than it does; and a form of proceeding, which may be all very well and appropriate when particular interests are involved, becomes a positive injustice when it is applied to small tenements, such as mine, and under such circumstances as the

present. People can abscond with impunity from the houses, and people can obtain and retain possession with equal freedom from punishment. Transfer the jurisdiction to a magistrate, in particular instances, and the matter would soon be put to rights.

"Very true," said Mr. Scriggs, "very true. It's positively awful, sir, how these small tenants serves out the landlords. I'm not a hunnatural man, sir, and I don't want to see any poor creetur without a roof over his head; but I do say this, as I have always said, that the present system is an encouragement to wice and ewasion of rent. And when a man has a decent house for him and his family to live in, it is only fair he should pay those who gave it him suffin' as a return, instead of going on cheating and absconding, and destroying, as they does at present." After these bursts of only just indignation from master and man, they both fell into silence.

"I'm determined to have that rascal out," said Mr. Piffin, after a pause. "If we mustn't commit a breach of the peace, we must see what can be done by stratagem."

"You leave it to me; I'll manage him, sir," said Mr. Scriggs.

CHAPTER V.

After all these storms, at length a calm appears.

The morning succeeding the events last related found Mr. Piffin engaged in the agreeable duty of receiving a quarter's rent from Mr. Bloker, the tenant of No. 3—a circumstance which was rendered doubly gratifying to our landlord, not only from the contrast it presented to the conduct of Nos. 1 and 2, but because Mr. Bloker had, from a variety of reasons, been regarded with a species of suspicion from the first, and the probability of his turning out wrong, frequently and strongly considered. Mr. Bloker, however, as it turned out, was, after all, the model tenant; and the payment of his first quarter's rent of £7, was celebrated by Mr. Piffin in not only affording his tenant ardent expressions of praise for his conduct, but in conferring upon him the more substantial recompense of five shillings and three glasses of brandy.

"I'm sorry to hear such a bad account of the new houses," said Mr. Bloker, as his left eye made a violent effort to look behind his left ear, and nearly disappeared altogether in the effort; "but you must expect these little inconveniences at first. You may depend upon it, it will all come right in the end."

"I hope you're comfortable, Mr. Bloker," said Mr. Piffin, with much favour.

"Oh! yes, sir, thank ye; it just suits us—your house does. To be sure, we have had to put up with a few annoyances from the curiosity of our neighbours, who persist in getting into our back-yard, and looking into our kitchen; but then, to be sure, three-cornered stools or brickbats is available for purposes of protection, and we have nearly put an end to the system. I hates spies!"

"Ah! Mr. Bloker; I need scarcely say that I wish all my tenants had turned out like you. You are a model tenant."

"And yours is a model house. Good morning, Mr. Piffin."

"Good morning, Mr. Bloker; thank you."

And the landlord and the tenant parted on the best terms imaginable.

"Well! they are looking up at last," ruminated our hero. "I must not despair yet:" and he rang the parlour bell in great spirits, and Mrs. Meek appeared, with much smiling—for Mrs. Meek had an ear for bells, and always knew when the bell rang sweetly or angrily; and in the first event would answer it herself, and in the second send the boy Timkins. Mr. Piffin communicated the excellent conduct of the tenant of No. 3 to his worthy housekeeper; and then, in obedience to a suggestion from

that personage, presented her with money for keeping the house—a duty which he had not performed with so much alacrity and cheerfulness for many weeks past.

"Here's a note that has just come for you, sir," said Mrs. Meek, handing to her master a dirty, crumpled-up piece of paper, as if some ingenious individual had been endeavouring to fold it so that the bearer could, by no possibility of means, make himself acquainted with the contents. "I did not give it you before, sir, because you were engaged; and I believe it comes from Mr. Scriggs."

Mr. Piffin seized the document with much anxiety, tore it open, and read as follows:—

"Respected Sir—

"As regards the hóuse No 2 I begs to inform yeu I 'ave obtained possessission ('Bravo,' said Mr. Piffin, and then continued.) "The way I did the trik was like this Knowin the poogilistik temper of the present tenant, which is fond of fightin as well as being cokhey hoop I ired a briclars man of hirish berth to challenge him to a set too Well the hirishman went into the street, and called out to the tenant to come and foight him like a man and as he didnt come he threw stones at the tenant and crowhed like a cock and callhed him a guffin and used other irritatin means vereupon the tenant being goaded eventually went into the street and having stripped they went to work fightin like Rooshans Vilst they was so engaged I slipt into the house locked the door and barred all the winders and

now retain possion as yew will pleas to rekcllect I always said I should

"Yours ever

"J Scriggs

"PS—The batile in the street has caused the whole of the pains of glass in the shop winder No 4 to be smashed The strecher is jist goink round the corner conweyink the Irishman to the horsespittle"

Shall we own it, that when Mr. Piffin had concluded the perusal of this epistle, he became greatly delighted. He did not regret the breach of the peace, nor the probable breach in the Irishman's head that had been occasioned. The man was out, and that was all he cared to contemplate, despite the sacrifice either of his own property or the blood of the bricklayer. He commended the ingenuity of Mr. Scriggs to Mrs. Meek, and spoke enthusiastically of his agent's foresight and perspicacity.

That evening Mr. Piffin went out to a Charitable Dinner, and, in proposing the health of somebody, he took occasion to refer to his own efforts, with a view to the amelioration of the habitations of the poorer classes. He described his property as in a most flourishing condition, which was all the more gratifying, as it at first gave evidence of turning out anything but favourably to his intentions or desires; and when he sat down, he was tremendously applauded with knife-handles and wine-

glasses, and forthwith regarded as a very rich, a very successful, and a very philanthropic member of society. Mr. Piffin returned home very early, as was his custom, and on his arrival found another letter waiting his perusal of a still dirtier and more mysterious character than the one he had received in the morning. It ran thus:—

"J Scriggs presence his compts to Mr Piffin and I beg to say that the man has gained possetion again by cumin down the chimbley and having ordered J Scriggs out under pain of death J Scriggs had to retire There is such a mess and the new paper is smuthered in suet

"Yours truly

J Scriggs

"PS—I dont knows what the shop is up to but they have been carpenkterin all day long and a Punch and Judy drum and a piebald cab horse has just been taken in.

"NB—Pleas to observe that two pleecemen in plane cloths have been lookin down the chimbley pots of No 3 this evenin"

Mr. Piffin was thunderstruck with the contents of this document. "Then comes my fit again," Macbeth would have said under similar circumstances—Mr. Piffin said nothing of the kind. He had recourse to his usual remedies of falling into a rage and ringing the bell. A thing that was unusual, in such a state of affairs as the present, Mrs. Meek rushed into the room—

"Where's the boy, ma'am?" shouted Mr. Piffin.

"I don't know," stammered Mrs. Meek; "I don't know, sir. I sent him out an hour ago to fetch some moist sugar, and he's not come back. I hope he's not been waylaid and murdered."

"Don't be a fool, ma'am," said Mr. Piffin; "the rascal—a pretty time of night to be out. He's gone a courting, I suppose."

"Oh! for shame, Mr. Piffin," retorted Mrs. Meek; "to suggest such a thing of a youth like that. No; you may depend upon it, something"—

Bang! went the knocker of the house door.

"Who's that?" gasped Mr. Piffin. "What can that mean? Somebody must have got over the garden-gate." "Oh! dear—oh dear!" muttered Mrs. Meek, in great terror.

"See who it is," said Mr. Piffin, seizing the fire-shovel, "before you open the door."

Bang! went the knocker of the house door again.

Mr. Piffin, in his excitement, whirled the fire-shovel over his head, and nearly gave Mrs. Meek a blow, which would effectually have put her out of all present misery.

"See who it is," said Mr. Piffin. "Look through the keyhole, woman."

Thus enjoined, Mrs. Meek crept down the passage stealthily, and obeyed.

"Who is it?" said Mr. Piffin, from the parlour door.

Mrs. Meek gave a small scream, and uttered the word "Policemen!"

"Policemen!" echoed Mr. Piffin, perhaps more alarmed than if his housekeeper had said "Burglars!" "What can they want? at this hour of night, too! Put the chain up, open the door, and ask them what they want, Mrs. Meek."

Mrs. Meek did as she was directed. Immediately the door was thus partially opened, the sniffling sounds of the boy Timkins, in tears, came into the passage. "Oh! Mrs. Meek," said the boy, jerking the words out in a spasmodic, lachrymose manner—"I'm—in—custody. I've been taken—to—the—station-house. I'm—going—to be—transported—I'm sure—I shall—oh!"

"Is Mr. Piffin at home?" said a gruff voice, authoritatively.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Meek.

"Then we want to see him immediately," was the reply, on the part of the gruff voice. "So have the goodness to open the door, for we have no time to lose."

Mr. Piffin gave the word, and the door was thrown open. The next moment two policemen, each bearing a lantern with the light disclosed, and each holding the boy Timkins by an arm, entered the passage.

"Walk in here, gentlemen!" The members of the force and their prisoner entered the back parlour, followed by Mrs. Meek. "Now, what is the matter, gentlemen," continued Mr. Piffin; "what has my boy been doing, that you should consider it necessary to arrest him?"

"Well, sir," said the foremost policeman, "he's been attempting to pass this here—what we call a 'shoful' coin"—and the speaker held up a half-sovereign to the light. "His statement at the station was, that it was given him by your servant to buy sugar with; and if that is so"—

"Yes," I gave it him," chimed in Mrs. Meek, "and master gave it me."

"Then, sir," went on the policeman, "explain from what quarter you received it. It bears such evidence of efficient coining, and is apparently so recently manufactured, that it is of the greatest importance that we trace it to the maker."

Mr. Piffin was in great bewilderment for a few moments, and then exclaimed: "Why, Mr. Bloker, of Oak-Apple Row, gave it me this morning as part of his rent, I'm certain."

The first policeman looked hard at the second policeman, who returned the gaze in a still more stony manner, and then both winked mysteriously at one another.

"Oak-Apple Row," said the first—"just as we thought. Will you have the kindness to exhibit

the money you may have about your person?" Mr. Piffin did as he was requested, and turned out a quantity of coin upon the table. The two policemen fell upon it with the most vulture-like energy, and bit, rung, and examined each piece in profound silence; then, collecting five or six pieces, and pushing the remainder towards Mr. Piffin, the first went on: "Just as we thought. We must trouble you to come with us, sir."

"Arrested!" cried Mr. Piffin, whilst Mrs. Meek gave a small yelp of horror, and the boy, Timkins, went off into a fresh cataract of sobs.

"Not exactly arrested," said the policeman; "but we must trouble you to come with us to the man who gave you this coin; that's all."

It was useless for Mr. Piffin to reply, or to urge any reasons why he should not comply with the request of the guardian of public morals. In a very short time, therefore, the two policemen and Mr. Piffin were in a cab, on their way to the celebrated street. It cannot be said that Mr. Piffin felt in any degree comfortable or inclined to merriment in his present position. Riding in a cab with two members of the police force, with a very uncertain notion as to how or when the ride is to end, is a method of taking exercise not generally adopted by individuals of a timid temperament of mind. The cab arrived in due course at Oak-Apple Row; and when the inmates alighted, what was Mr. Piffin's

surprise to find the street full of people, and a great blaze of light flashing up and down the thoroughfare, revealing the white faces of an assembled crowd, suffused with smiles, and looking, in the chiaro-oscuro effect that surrrounded them, like a large collection of very jolly moons.

"Good gracious, is the street on fire?" exclaimed Mr. Piffin, and he involuntarily exhibited a desire to go at once and ascertain for himself the cause of the unusual commotion.

"Not so fast, sir!" said the first policeman, laying his iron grip upon Mr. Piffin's shoulder, as if that gentleman were endeavouring to escape. "All in good time."

Mr. Piffin certainly was in good time to see what was going on, for he soon perceived that the excitement was occasioned by the proceedings at No. 4 in the street, the model shop, where there was a large painted canvas hung across the front of the house, illustrated with huge theatrical figures, and several naptha lamps were fizzing away underneath. The two Master Gimples were in front, on a species of temporary platform, the one beating a big drum, and the other blowing violently through a cracked trumpet; whilst Mr. Gimple was bellowing, at the highest pitch of his voice, pointing at the same time to the painted canvas with a small cane—"Now, then, be in time; the last performance to-night; just going to begin. Comic singing

and dancing. Only one penny. Trial of skill. Hot apple dumplings will be eaten by the audience, gratuitously furnished, and a pocket-knife will be given to the succ—essful—com—petitor. Be in time. This way to the comic singing. Horsemanship in the back-yard; one penny extra!"

Horror upon horror! Mr. Piffin's model shop had been transformed into a "penny gaff." The boys and girls were thronging into the show, scrambling and fighting at the place where the money was taken, a post occupied by the Honourable Mrs. Gimple, who was collecting the halfpence with an earnestness and gravity that showed the occupation was to her by no means a novelty.

"I'll stop that depraved ruffian!" exclaimed Mr. Piffin. "He's turned my shop into a den of buffoonery. I'll stop him—"

"Be quiet, do!" said the first policeman in a hoarse whisper; "leave him alone. Don't draw attention upon us. That's the house, is'nt it?" and the policeman pointed to No. 3, where all the shutters were closed, and the whole place presented an appearance of quiet and repose that strikingly contrasted with the proceedings taking place at the shop.

"Yes," said Mr. Piffin, "that's where Mr. Bloker lives."

The first policeman gave a low, peculiar whistle, and the next moment a tall, hard-featured man in

black, and buttoned up to the throat, presented himself.

"All right," said the new comer, whose mere appearance and manner proclaimed him to be a detective officer; "all right; I think we've nicked the birds; we shall have a struggle, though. I'm not quite sure they've not got scent of the work; Jim's at the back."

Mr. Piffin was in a state of cold perspiration at these mysterious remarks on the part of the new comer. His excitement was further increased by hearing a distant rattle, as if proceeding from the back premises of No. 3.

"Come along," said the man in black, and the three policemen rushed over to the door of No. 3, and knocked loudly. No response was returned; but the rattle still continued from the back. "Smash in the door!" said the buttoned up man.

"What!" shrieked Mr. Piffin, "it's just new—"

"Be quiet!" shouted the implacable man in black. "Smash it!"

The two policemen ran against the door with their full power, and the door yielded on its hinges and fell flat into the passage, like a blown down card.

"Draw your staves, turn on your lanterns, and keep close," were the observations of the man in black, and the police rushed into the passage and up the stairs.

On the first landing another policeman presented himself, getting in at the back window, with a staff in one hand and a lantern in the other.

"They've been trying the back way," said this one, "but we stopped them. They're destroying the apparatus; and if we're not very quick they will have the house on fire, and the evidence destroyed."

A lurid glare at this moment presented itself over, under, and through all the cracks of the doors of the rooms on the first floor.

"By George, they're at it with a vengeance," said the man in black, and he thundered away at the door of the room on the first floor. "Open the door!" said he.

"Keep the varmin out," was the expression, uttered by a low hoarse voice, heard from within.

"Smash the door!" was again the order given, to Mr. Piffin's inexpressible horror, and as rapidly obeyed. Down fell the weak portal, and into the room rushed the officers. A miserably haggard woman, with her clothes all hanging loose about her person, no other than Mrs. Bloker, with a mixture of fear and hatred written in every lineament of her face, was engaged at a roaring fire in the grate, destroying a mass of metal articles and bottles; and, as she hurled, and thrust, and dug evidence after evidence into the fire, as if they could not be consumed too quick, the fierce and variegated

flames cast upon her weird and horrible figure such a glare, that she seemed like some frightened witch surprised at an unholy sacrifice.

Standing close beside her, in attitudes of defence, were Mr. Bloker and a man, evidently his companion. Bloker looked terrible; his left eye was still looking over his left ear, and appeared to be fixed on the window behind him, whilst his right eye encountered the gaze of the tall man in black, whom he recognised with a scowl of hatred and defiance, as if he had an old account to settle with him. Mr. Bloker was armed with a bar of iron; his companion was a podgy little man, with very red whiskers and a bald head, and he was armed with a chopper. Scattered about the room were pieces of metal and base coin, but too plainly showing—despite the work of destruction pursued so energetically by Mrs. Bloker—what had been the trade carried on at No. 3. The proceedings that ensued were sharp, decisive, and rapid. The tall man in black called upon Mr. Bloker and his companion to surrender; Mr. Bloker replied with an oath. The tall man in black thereupon directed the arrest of the trio, and, in pursuance of such command, two officers rushed upon Mr. Bloker, two upon the podgy man, and one upon Mrs. Bloker. The podgy man was soon overcome; at the first onslaught he made a violent chop at his aggressors, but, missing his aim, fell on his belly, and was seized and bound.

Mrs. Bloker, too, very soon succumbed, and made up by the strength of her language for the deficiency of her physical powers.'

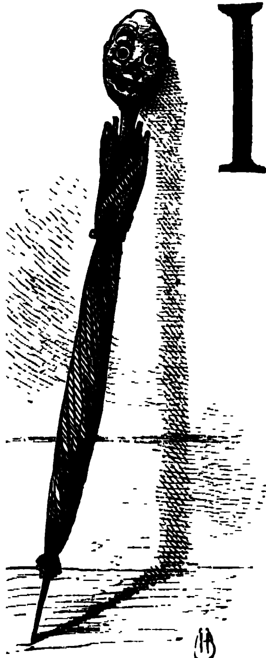
As for Mr. Bloker, he was a customer who was not so easily settled with. He seemed to be actuated with the rage and desperation of a wild beast at bay. He wielded the instrument he held with terrible effect, and two officers fell, stunned by his blows, from the conflict. It was then the tall man in black, hissing with suppressed fury,'measured him with an expression of scorn, from head to foot, and, springing suddenly upon him, grappled with him before he had time to strike. There was a fierce clinging together—a furious staggering about, which shook the very house—the bodies of the man in black and the coiner writhed for the mastery: it seemed as if the detective were about to be overcome, when the now disengaged officers, who had secured their opponents, went to the rescue—and then the man in black burst from the grasp of the coiner, having possessed himself of the bar of iron. Mr. Bloker now saw his chance was up; but, to the astonishment of all, and seemingly actuated by a sudden impulse, he rushed to the window, threw open the shutters, flung up the sash, and, before any one could stop him, had jumped into the street. The officers rushed down stairs: a body laid in the road, its head in a dark pool: they

raised it: it was the tenant of No. 3. He was dead!

When we last had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Piffin, and upon our making inquiries respecting the Oak-Apple Row houses, he informed us that they were progressing a little more favourably; that they were all re-let to weekly tenants; but that he had still a great many annoyances to put up with on their account, owing, as he said, to that origin of so many abuses—"the state of the law" and "the law of the state."

MY AUNT'S UMBRELLA.

CHAPTER I.



IT was a curious, old-fashioned umbrella. It had a brown, stout, wooden stick, the handle of which was surmounted by a carved head, with a very ugly but a very expressive countenance. Its eyes were large, round, and open, as if they had just been startled out of a deep sleep, and their expression would have been considered as representing "horror," had not its mouth to some extent negatived such a description, for it crescented across its face, from ear to ear, like a half moon in a fit of laughter. Its thin, peaky,

irregular nose, again, was singularly opposed to the fat, and generally jovial, condition of its cheeks and chins; but the deep furrows across its forehead, the crows' feet on its temples, and the wrinkles and dimples everywhere, were not so much emblematical of its age, as of the fact, that the carver who had had the work of cutting out its countenance, had evidently considered his job to be a good one, and been determined to make the most of it. The shape of its head was conical, and from the centre of its bald and polished crown arose a knob of such striking dimensions, that denoted, both phrenologically and physically, a disposition to combativeness of no ordinary development, even in a stick; the general effect of the head being, that it looked as if it were suffering from water on the brain, and laughing with horror at the very thought of such a thing. From a hole drilled through its neck depended two long thongs of brown leather, serving as a sort of comforter, and further down it wore a ruffle of ivory chess-pawns, being the decorations of the tips of its whalebone ribs. These latter were hid by a tightly folded gown, originally of the colour of pea green, but which, from the action of the sun and rain, and the continuous furling and unfurling it had undergone during many years, now presented nearly every shade of that colour, and, in many places, no colour at all. The general appearance of the old umbrella,

considering its age and service, could not but have been considered uniform and satisfactory. No portion of its person had as yet burst into that peculiar dropsical condition which appears to seize upon implements of its class at a certain period in their existence, as if they suffered from concealed tumours. It was still in possession of a very fair figure—neither baggy at its waist nor protuberant at its base, and no evidences either of distorted or dislocated ribs yet betrayed themselves. Its ferule was long and sharp, and it stood firm and sturdy in its little boot of polished brass. It was altogether a very respectable and curious umbrella, although it might have been old-fashioned. It would have done good service too, even now, in a rough and roaring night, and would have fought hard and strong before the elements could have made it a turncoat in the battle, as your modern thin and delicate umbrellas will become on the smallest gusty provocation. Not that its capabilities in this respect were ever likely again to be tested; for my aunt, in whose possession it had been from the time when its appearance would have been considered fashionable, had long ago regarded it merely as a sort of little household god, and entitled only to her reverence and regard. It was an old thing she had used and been accustomed to in byegone days, and its association with the events of her life in those times had given it a sort of personally historical

value in her eyes. We all can cling with fondness to mementos left us of our past days. We can love an old chair, or an old clock, or an old book, when they speak to us of those old times which seem to have been so far happier than the present. So did my aunt love this old umbrella; and to see it standing in its usual corner, with its head, looking like that of a hilarious traitor's on a pole, leaning against the wall, so immoveable, and yet so apparently intelligent, in the watchfulness of its wide-opened eyes and mouth, no one would have blamed her for such affection. Sometimes, indeed, when dust might have been supposed to have accumulated in its folds, my aunt would open it, and then it uttered a sharp whirring sound, and looked like a large frightened bat, spreading its wings for flight. But this periodical exercise was of very short duration; and after it had been whirled round three or four times in the garden, and thoroughly dusted, it was carefully rolled up again, its girths tightened, and itself placed in its old position in the same corner of the room, where it continued to hold confidential communication with the hearth broom and the kettle-holder, which both hung adjacent to it.

For my aunt was extremely severe and precise in her habit of always keeping things in their proper places. Nothing disturbed her so much as anything being removed from its assigned position. Her little establishment at Bayswater, with a small

back garden, where my aunt cultivated flowers and shrubs, and the cats cultivated each other's acquaintance, with a view of Kensington Gardens from the front windows that was desirable, and with a view of a mews, with clothes hanging out to dry from the back windows, that was not desirable —was a perfect model of regularity and neatness. The first rule of my aunt's conduct in life was discipline; her chiefest necessity—dusters. The whole house was like a great eight-day clock, of which my aunt was the ever active, never-tiring pendulum. Everybody in the establishment was made subject to this regularity; and even the "pets" she had adopted as her companions perfectly understood, that, upon their being strictly correct and regular, depended the continuance of their mistress' patronage and favour. The little green parrot thoroughly well knew the exact moment he would be covered up with a cloth, and when it was considered proper for him to scream for his dinner. The old blackbird in the garden, who had only one eye and a very rusty suit of feathers, always shook himself out to look his best, at the particular time when he knew my aunt would come and make a chirruping noise to him, and say, "Poor Jack—poor old Jack!" and perhaps regale him with an unctuous snail. "Miss Podds" (for that was the name of the cat) was the most regular cat, too, that ever adorned the domestic hearth-rug. It had won my aunt's heart

when it was only a kitten, it being at that time in the possession of a neighbour named Miss Podds, by the systematic manner in which it came and sat on my aunt's garden wall, at a certain hour of the day, and washed its face for an hour together. Mr. Pilgrim, the gardener of the establishment, always came and told my aunt when "Miss Podds' cat" was on the wall, until Miss Podds' cat, which had long been my aunt's property by right of prescription, became so by right of grant, and, in flattering remembrance of the generous donor, continued to bear her name.

The regiments of curiosities, too, that occupied the mantelpieces and tables of the sitting-room in my aunt's house might all have been glued to their respective positions, so rigidly did they maintain their acknowledged stations. No one had ever seen the glittering Joss taken off the mantelpiece, and nobody ever knew whether he was solid silver, or merely stuffed with cement. Nobody had ever been allowed to open any of the numerous caskets lying about, to ascertain whether they contained jewels or snuff; and no one ever knew how it was that the musical box on the cheffonier, that nobody ever dared to wind up, always played its tunes right through the first Monday in every month, and at no other time uttered a sound. Most of my aunt's curiosities were presents from her lamented brother, a certain "Uncle Gregory," who had been in the

Royal Navy, and had travelled all over the world, and whose portrait, representing a gentleman in a naval uniform, holding a large speaking trumpet in one hand, and backed by a flash of lightning, a pillar, and a curtain, hung over the mantelpiece. This Uncle Gregory had been my godfather; and, from certain inuendoes uttered by my aunt, and her always speaking of him as "your poor Uncle Gregory, of the Pelican," I was led to infer he had met with some signal and dreadful fate, whilst engaged in one of his many adventures. He had, however, always been to me an object of extreme admiration in my youthful days, which was increased by my knowing that there was a sword up stairs that had been Uncle Gregory's, and which my aunt kept locked up in a cupboard, tied to a clothes peg, as if it would have walked out and killed somebody of its own accord, without some such restrictive measures. I remember that at school I had boasted of the possession of this sword; and, from the circumstance of my having once drawn it from its scabbard, and my family connection with "Uncle Gregory," I was regarded by the boys as an authority upon matters of adventure generally, and desperate combats in particular. Uncle Gregory was supposed to have been the original possessor of the curious umbrella, and to have presented it to my aunt.

It was a fine summer's evening, and I had called at my aunt's with my travelling bag and

umbrella, to bid her good bye; for the train by which I was going out of town for my vacation-trip, would leave the London Bridge terminus in a few hours.

I had found my aunt, who was a pretty little elderly woman, with a very straight figure and regular features, in the garden, in a broad hat, a large holland pinafore and a pair of brown gloves, busily engaged, with the assistance of Mr. Pilgrim, in gardening operations. The proceedings then going on appeared to be of an exterminating character, and they consisted in adopting measures for the destruction of those creatures that preyed upon my aunt's shrubs and flowers, and principally had reference to snails and slugs.

"Oh, those nasty things!" were the first words my aunt uttered, after bestowing on me an affectionate greeting; "they give me so much trouble. Here's another, Mr. Pilgrim!"

"M'um?"

"Here's another slug; I cannot think where they all come from!"

"Oh, what a large 'un, m'um. There's six on 'em now, m'um, ready to be salted."

"Salted!" said I, with some notion that this was a method of preserving rather than destroying them.

"Oh, yes, sir, we salts them, and then they womits theirselves away. It's the best thing for

'em, sir. We can't get rid of 'em like we do the snails; nobody won't eat slugs."

"Eat slugs!" I exclaimed; "no, nor snails either, I should think."

"Oh, sir, there you mistake," said Mr. Pilgrim, learnedly; "the old Frenchman in the next street always comes regularly for the snails; he likes them, he does; he bakes 'em in the oven, and then he eats 'em with pins."

I was about to venture an observation upon this extraordinary diet, when my aunt stopped my intended remarks by directing Mr. Pilgrim to desist from his work, and to go and tell Deborah to get the tea ready; and then requesting me to enter the sitting-room, and to scrape my boots well first; and to put down my travelling bag and umbrella, and mind where I put them; and to sit down quietly till she came, and not to pull the things about or tease the parrot, and that she would not be long taking off her gardening dress, she skipped away to prepare her costume for the important evening meal.

I had not long to wait; for my aunt was, I believe, somewhat suspicious of my propriety of conduct towards her pets when opportunities of irritating them, unrestrained by her presence, occurred; and I had only time to take up the old umbrella and involuntarily fence at the green parrot, causing it to give a series of alarmed shrieks at such irregular treatment, before she entered.

"Oh, my dear Herbert, pray put it down; you are always in mischief; you'll make the parrot mad. You really must have more thought, or I don't know how you will get on in the world." She took the old umbrella from me gently, and put it in its usual corner. "There now, sit down and be good, do; and tell me where you are going, and how long you will be away. You're scarcely old enough to travel alone, I do believe; you are so very thoughtless and impetuous. I shall never forget the agony of your poor mother when you were a baby. You were always doing something to terrify her, that no other baby was ever known to do; and always crying because you were not allowed to play with the carving-knife or the steaming teakettle. But where are you going?"

I told her I was going to travel on the Continent for a month. That I thought of first stopping a few days at Ramsgate for the sea-bathing; and then of crossing to Ostend, visiting the Belgian towns, running up the Rhine to Heidelberg, walking over the Oberland into Italy, and finishing my tour by a week in Paris.

"Bless me, my dear," said my aunt, "why it sounds as if you were going all over the world, like your poor uncle Gregory; only the dangers of travelling are not near so great now as they were in his time. I recollect he never went away without loaded pistols

in his portmanteau and a dagger in his hat-box, and he always carried his money in his boots. Things are not so bad now, I know; but I wish you were as regular and as careful as he was. I hope you have safe pockets."

"Oh yes, aunt," I answered; "but, safe as they may be, you cannot keep your money long in them when you're travelling in these days. It has always been a matter of doubt to me which flies the quicker during a vacation trip—money or time. It's almost as unpleasant to find all your time gone and not your money, as to find all your money gone and not your time."

"Why, how you do talk, Herbert," said my aunt, attempting to look shocked. "I'm afraid you are getting very improvident; you ought to be more regular. If you put down all you have spent every day the last thing before you go to bed, and never spend more than a certain allowed sum, you would never have any difficulty in keeping proper accounts. I never have. Then, again, you are so forgetful. For my part, I don't know how you manage with your luggage at all, in your scampering reckless way. I know when I travel to Brighton or Bath, it's as much as Deborah and I can do to see after it."

"Never travel with luggage in these times, aunt," I went on; "always send it on to the place you're likely to be at when you're

likely to want it. It's sure to turn up somewhere; besides, it's becoming quite a recognised system of modern travel to lose one's luggage. It keeps up a most efficient institution in the Lost Luggage Office; it makes the telegraphs pay good dividends; it teaches people to keep their tempers; it instructs them how to do without things they don't want, and it altogether adds to the pleasurable excitement of the tour, and furnishes an incident of travel to write home about, almost as exciting as missing a train or a boat that you thought was going, or catching a train that you thought was not."

I was a favourite with my aunt, and she knew that her lectures upon caution and regularity never made any very great impression on me, so she laughed good-humouredly, said I was incorrigible, and that I always endeavoured to extract fun from everything.

"Some things," I continued, encouraged by my aunt's pleasant laugh, "are positively made to be lost; for instance, umbrellas—"

My aunt instantly stopped her laughter, drew herself up rather sharply and sternly, whilst her face assumed an expression of gravity, and her eyes fixed themselves upon mine with a reproving glance, which was not in any way relaxed when she saw that the observation I had made had been partly suggested by my contemplation of the old umbrella in the corner.

"Some things, Herbert," interrupted my aunt in a measured, earnest tone of voice, "are not fit subjects for ridicule."

I immediately became silent and respectful, for it was very unusual to see my aunt so much annoyed. I certainly knew that she regarded the old umbrella with a particular affection; but I had not intended my observation to apply, by way of specific insult, to that venerable object, which was now grinning at the little feud. My aunt and I were both embarrassed as to what to say next, when the clock in the hall, after emitting a peculiar long "whirr," as if all its wheels and weights were running down together, struck six; and, as the last shrill "ting" died away, the door was thrown open, and Deborah brought in the tea things and Mr. Pilgrim the urn.

It was quite wonderful to see my aunt make tea; everything was done with so much precision and neatness. She looked to me like a conjuror arranging the apparatus for a particular trick of more than ordinary complexity, and who took great care to convince you that you were not going to be cheated. You would almost have sworn that the curious tea-caddy had a false bottom; and that, when it was opened a second time, you would be shown barley in one compartment and coffee-berries in the other. You would have had your doubts, also, as to whether the teapot had not been constructed for the purpose of pouring out all sorts of

different liquors, from gunpowder tea to salts, just as might be commanded; and that, if you had asked for the former, whether a squib would not have gone off from the spout. You would not have been surprised to have seen a Queen of Hearts or a Knave of Clubs walk out of the sugar-bason or the milk-jug; and you felt positively convinced that, if the urn were uncovered, it would be found to contain a large collection of pocket-handkerchiefs and gold watches, and perhaps a bowl of fish or a live goose. Even the tea-cups and saucers looked magical. And the way in which my aunt handled these various and mysterious properties only confirmed the impression that some great feat of presdigitation was about to be performed.

I used to watch the process with much interest and curiosity, and calculate upon the number of operations that would have to be performed before the trick would appear to be completed, and my aunt would have seemed to say, "Eh! Presto. Go! There you see, ladies and gentlemen, the water has passed from the urn into the tea-pot, the water that was in the cups has passed into the bason, the sugar has dissolved, the milk has disappeared, and in their place I present you with a magic cup of tea!" And then when my aunt made you a little bow, as she presented you with your cup, you only wanted a piano to strike up the "Overture to Masaniello," to make you believe her to be a "Wizard of one

of the Points of the Weathercock" of no common order.

"Herbert," said my aunt, after Deborah and Mr. Pilgrim had left the room, and she had taken the first sip of her tea, "I was much offended at the remark you made just now."

"I meant nothing aunt."

"You seemed," said my aunt, in a judicial manner, "to make reference to a certain article as if it were possible that, at some time or other, that certain article ought to be, or might be, lost. You appeared also to make those observations with a disregard on your part as to whether that certain article was lost or not; and you ought to have known that any such suggestion, or any such indifference, coming especially from you, must have been extremely painful to me." My aunt took a sip of tea.

"I assure you, aunt," I said apologetically, "I had no knowledge that my remarks would have caused you pain, nor have I ever been informed why a joking reference on my part to that umbrella should be considered inappropriate."

"The possession of that umbrella is dearly prized by me, Herbert," continued my aunt, still sternly judicial. "It formerly belonged to your poor uncle Gregory, and it was presented by him to me on the day you were born. Somehow, therefore, I have always connected it in association with

you; and, although I do not hope to make myself understood, I may at once say, it is my belief, that with it is your fate in life allied. People are born under particular stars. You, Herbert, were born under that umbrella."

This information was as novel to me as it was strange, and I muttered some words of surprise.

My aunt took another sip of tea, and went on with her "judgment:" "That umbrella has not been used often; but, whenever it has been used, something has occurred that has been of the last importance to you. It was used the night you were born. It sheltered your poor uncle Gregory when he went through a pouring rain for the doctor. One day, it was in May, the nurse took it out with you, and you were lost for twelve hours, and almost caused your poor mother's death, who fancied you would be taken away, and be made a chimney-sweeper of, and it's a mercy you were not. Once the thieves broke into the house and stole it, and immediately it was gone you fell ill with the measles, until your poor mother advertised in the papers for its recovery, and when it came back, as it did in a short time, the measles disappeared, and you got well again. At another time I noticed that unaccountably it had broken one of its ribs, and the very next post I heard that you had been thrown from a horse, in jumping a gate, and were lying at an inn with your arm broken. I

could go on enumerating instances of how it is, I believe, connected with you, and you may therefore judge how jealously I guard it in my possession. Now you know, Herbert, the reason why I am so careful of it. It may be folly, it may be presentiment, but still I am convinced of this, that, when it is lost, you will be lost also." My aunt took another sip of tea, and finished her remarks and her cup at the same time.

I had listened in silent astonishment to these observations. I did not place any great degree of faith in her theory. It seemed so supremely ridiculous that my fortunes should be inseparably connected with an old umbrella—that I should have an old-fashioned umbrella standing in the relation to me of a Corsican Brother, and acting in sympathy with my feelings and movements. I saw, however, that the real secret of my aunt's theory was her anxiety for my welfare when I was away, and I, therefore, said nothing to endeavour to alter her expressed opinion upon the subject. I merely remarked I was not before acquainted with these circumstances, and hoped she would forgive me for having spoken so indifferently of an object which she prized so dearly.

The sternness of my aunt melted immediately. "Forgive you dear," she said, "I've nothing to forgive; only you are so wild, independent, and impetuous, that I fear, when you are away, you

never think of those who love you at home and are always thinking of you."

I assured my aunt that I always would think of her, and would write home regularly, and then we continued the conversation upon other points, in which my aunt bantered me, and asked me many questions as to when I should be married and settled, until a few minutes before eight, when Mr. Pilgrim entered to say that my cab was at the door ready to convey me to the railway station. As the train left London Bridge at half-past eight, I, of course, had not much time to lose, and my aunt was in a fever of excitement as to whether I should not be too late, and chided me for not having ordered the cab earlier; and then, having affectionately kissed me, she bade me get into the cab whilst she went up stairs. I accordingly seized my travelling bag and umbrella, and jumped into the Hansom at the door. The next moment my aunt came running down the garden with her broad hat on, and, leaning over the front of the cab, she pressed an elegantly-worked purse into my hand, and said, "Good bye, dear— don't forget what I have said, and be careful of yourself."

"Good bye, aunt! good bye, Mr. Pilgrim! good bye, Deborah!—I wont forget. London Bridge Station, Cabby! half-past eight o'clock train."

"All right, sir," and the next moment I was out of sight of my aunt and her establishment.

I was just in time. I had paid the cabman a shilling more than his fare because he had not got change, having only, as he said, "taken a sixpence that day." I had paid for my ticket, and had rushed to the lost luggage office, where I had left my luggage, and given directions for it to be sent on; I had jumped into a first-class compartment; and at the first scream of the railway whistle, and as the train began to move, I almost gave a scream as loud as the engine, and bounded up as if I had sat on a serpent, for there before me, in the opposite seat, nestling close to my travelling bag, was my aunt's umbrella, with its head smiling at me grimly. The truth flashed upon me in a moment: in my hurry to leave I had brought away my aunt's umbrella instead of my own, and now it was too late to return it!

CHAPTER II.

It was the morning of the second day that I had been at Ramsgate. I had bathed, and was indulging, like a modern Canute, in a period of contemplative rest, in one of the *fauteuils* on the sands, amongst a crowd of other modern Canutes, who were poking holes with their sticks, lounging, reading, ogling, or chatting, but all being browned in the fierce glare of an August sun, and basted with

the cooling sea breeze. Most of the modern Canutes were Londoners, and all the modern Canutes exhibited, in a greater or less degree, in their faces, the time they had been placed before the fires of the summer sun. They looked as if they were all cooking themselves into a state of health. There were some whose white faces showed that they had only just been put down to roast; there were others who were done brown, to a turn, and who looked positively delicious; whilst there were those whose noses, bursting into blisters, and generally florid condition, showed that they had been done just a turn too much. As for myself, I was basking under the shadow of my aunt's umbrella, for I had put it up, to fulfil a double purpose; in the first place, because it was extremely hot, and I had not yet acclimatised myself sufficiently to endure the sun's rays any length of time, without experiencing considerable inconvenience in the nape of my neck, and a generally sticky, parboiled sensation creeping over me; and in the second place, because the peculiarity of my aunt's umbrella, when it was open, made it less the subject of remark than when it was closed; and, as I was compelled to take it perpetually about with me, until I could return it to her, lest some accident should overtake it, I wished to show that I was carrying it with a purpose. Although I was quite isolated under my umbrella, and, socially, a perfect stranger

to all those happy individuals sitting, walking, digging, laughing, and roasting around me, I felt on familiar terms with everybody. I had a species of consciousness that I had met them all somewhere before. Their faces, their figures, their manners, their characteristics, were all familiar to me. The whole assembly looked like a large and extremely amiable family circle, into which I had been frequently before admitted as a guest. No doubt it was owing to my frequent visits to Ramsgate at this particular period of the year, that I became possessed with this feeling towards the individuals around me, and that I regarded them all as types of great and celebrated originals, with whom, year after year, I had become acquainted.

There was the young gentleman who had just come down, it being the first year of his going out of town alone, and whose bran new straw hat, with lively riband, incipient moustache, sixpenny cane, and general aspect of importance, showed he entertained no slight opinion of the deep responsibilities he had undertaken in having to look after himself. I felt I knew him intimately. There was the stout old gentleman, who had come down to Ramsgate during the month of August for the last thirty years—and from his clean, rosy, glittering, and effulgent appearance, looked as if he intended to do so for the next thirty years to come; and there, with him, was his good-humoured "good lady," a

counterpart of himself, who spent a perfect fortune in giving buns to dirty little beggar boys, and pennies to performing monkies; who always listened attentively to the terrible stories of misfortunes related to her by vagrants, and always bought largely of the men who went about with shell-work and those mysterious fluffy-looking white comforters, which appear to be as inseparable from the seaside as the blubber fish itself. I was familiar with them both from my youth. I felt, also, I was on excellent terms of friendship with that other rubicund old gentleman, who wore a little round hat, and who employed his whole time in looking out to sea through a telescope, as if he were playing the flute with his eye, apparently in anxious expectation of the return of some long absent ship, and who had a disposition to talk extremely nautical when a Margate lugger hove in sight, or the smoke of the Deal packet became visible. There, also, I recognised the aristocratic tailor from the West End, who always came down with his wife, and his family of three grown up sons and four growing up daughters, who occupied one of the largest houses in the town, and whose family led the fashion of the place, by dressing differently every morning, afternoon, and evening, and consequently becoming the nucleus of attraction, and the object of universal envy wherever they went. Here they were at present, in tremendous mode—

for the sons had all got on sailors' hats, with pink ribbons; boating jackets, with brass buttons; and flannel trowsers, with blue stripes; and the girls had all let their back hair down, and had mounted hats with feathers, and white muslin wrappers, with butterfly bows stuck all over them. I felt I could not lay claim to the honour of being on very intimate terms with this family, as I am apt to be diffident in the presence of quality, and cautious in boasting of my acquaintance with the great; but still I knew them well, at an extremely respectful distance. There was the belle of the sands, with an eye-glass, who was also the belle of the principal boarding-house, and who went about under the protecting shadow of a small pursy boy, her brother, who got quite sleek upon the quantities of treating he received from the lounging group of gentlemen now flirting with his "pretty sister;" and there were the two elderly ladies who were stopping at the same boarding-house as the belle, and whose private opinions were, that her proceedings were highly improper in having so many beaux, and who, by the aid of mushroom hats, periwinkle curls, and crinoline *jupons*, discounted their own ages at the rate of twenty per cent., for the purpose of occupying the same position of attraction; these also came within the circle of my seaside acquaintances. Besides these there were the old couples, who looked grandfathers and grandmothers, every inch

of them; and the young couples, who had just been married, or had just become happy fathers, and still happier mothers, and who were the progeny of the old couples; and the juvenile couples, of all ages and of all sizes, the progeny of the young couples; and there they were, all digging and laughing, and burying each other in the most humorous manner possible; and there were family dogs, going out into the sea after family walking-sticks, and barking loudly — and there was more laughing, and a great deal of shouting, and, altogether, the picture was one I always enjoyed, although my fashionable friend, Tom Stilton, will persist in telling me Ramsgate is "low," and in wondering what I can see in such a "howid" place.

Nor were these all the attractions—for, it being twelve o'clock, the excitement had commenced in earnest. The man with the day's papers had just come on the sands, and was rushing about amongst the chairs with the newspapers, spread out to their fullest extent before him, like flags of truce. If they did not go off with sufficient rapidity, he rung a small muffin bell violently, as much as to say the news was getting cold, and he whetted the appetite of the public by mentioning, in a loud tone of voice, items of intelligence, such as "Great Fire in Petticoat Lane! Change in the Ministry!" (contemplated), or "Capture of a Whale in Bedfordshire!" The tragic drama of "Punch and Judy" had just

been performed, for the sixth time, that morning; the wooden victims of Punch's barbarous *bâton* had received the assigned number of "toppers," and the Beadle, Schallaballa, Mr. Joey Grimaldi, Jack Ketch, and the Ghost had once more been put away into their box, whilst the proprietors of the exhibition had furled their green baize curtain, and were now leaning against the scaffolding of the show, smoking short pipes, with a savage and melancholy expression. "Punch" being over, other entertainments had broken out with great fury, and a fierce struggle was being carried on as to which of them should obtain the largest share of the public's attention, it always being conceded by all itinerant performers, that there is no chance against "Punch," and that you might as well play to the winds and the waves as hope to draw an audience when a "Punch" is in the neighbourhood. The curtain of the fantoccini had immediately been drawn up, and the proprietor had commenced violently to wag his head over the pan-pipes, which instrument thereupon emitted a very shrill and very uncertain imitation of a nautical hornpipe, whilst a little wooden sailor had danced on in an ecstasy of spirits and a complexity of strings. The man with the birds and the mice was evidently prepared to give battle to the fantoccini man; and, having arranged his apparatus, he had broken out with extraordinary energy, and a small canary, in a spangled

coat, was now hopping along a tight rope, and a white mouse was scampering up a stick to fetch a red flag from the summit, whilst other canaries, whose talents consisted in drawing small coaches and firing cannon at each other, were twittering about the table in an uncomfortable manner, and doing their tricks at the wrong times and in the wrong places, and making the most persistent endeavours to escape their task-master. "Now, sir; go along, sir; be quick, sir; show the ladies and gents what you can do, sir," shouted the proprietor, by which he hoped to convince the public of the highly familiar relations existing between himself and the canaries and mice, and the great respect they entertained for his authority and commands. Both the man with the fantoccini, and the man with the birds and the mice, were sending round the money-box in the most eager and desperate manner: for the fact was, that the band of Ethiopian minstrels, in lamp-black faces, curly wigs, and coloured shirts, who were highly popular with the public, and who had for some time past been tuning up their incongruous instruments, were now about to commence their entertainment of gymnastic vocalism, which generally consisted of thirty-six comic songs, with humorous nigger dialogues for particular members of the company between each verse, and elaborate choruses for everybody at the end. There were others, too, who were endeavouring to contribute to

the gratification of the amusement-loving public: for a perfect legion of organs occupied the ground at different points, and were apparently trying to grind each other down, and obtain harmonious supremacy. There was the barrel-organ, which possessed the additional feature of a monkey in a red coat, whose life seemed to be passed in being swung off and on the organ by means of a chain round his neck, and having experiments made upon him by the general public to ascertain what he would eat and what he would not; there was the large organ on wheels, that was drawn by a donkey, and showed you all the instruments, from "the trumpet to the kettle," playing together, of their own accord, in a glass case; there was the operatic organ, that was played, in a sentimental, revolutionary sort of way, by a grievous Italian, with extremely white teeth and yellow eyeballs; there was the old broken-down organ, that was pulled about on a stand, like a child's go-cart, and which was turned by an elderly blind man, who furnished an accompaniment of angry grunts, and was attended by a dog with a tin dish in his mouth; and, happiest invention of them all, there was the organ that wouldn't play a note, the handle of which was, nevertheless, ground with frantic energy by a poor blear-eyed, unshorn idiot, in a night-cap.

Everybody apparently had some business to perform by way of contributing to somebody else's

pleasure; and everybody's business appeared to be, at that particular moment, to make the fact known in the loudest and most decided manner possible. The men and boys with the saddle donkeys, and the donkey-chaises, and the goat-chaises, all shouted with one accord—and all rushed indiscriminately upon visitors to compel them to enjoy themselves with a gallop on a fast-trotting donkey, or a drive in a slow-going vehicle. To them it was as natural people should gallop on donkeys with peculiar dispositions, or drive themselves about in donkey-chaises, with uncertain wheels over uncertain ground, as it was that they should bathe. In fact, whether an individual should bathe or have a donkey ride immediately he came upon the sands, appeared to be the great bone of contention between the two classes of proprietors: for the bathing-machines' proprietors were ranged opposite the donkeys' proprietors, and fiercely urged their claims for support and patronage. Of course each set of proprietors obtained their customers; and what with the excitement on the one hand of getting the machines up for the bathers, and the bathers up into the machines; and, on the other hand, of getting the donkey riders up on to the donkeys, and the donkeys up to the mark of moving, there was plenty of enjoyment for everybody, and enough noise to have driven a deaf man mad.

In the midst of such sights and sounds, still was

I in a brown study, considering what the agony of my aunt must have been when she found the old umbrella gone, and thinking how anxiously she must have opened the letter I had sent her the next morning, informing her that the cherished object was in my possession—that it should receive from me the most careful solicitude and guardianship, until an opportunity should present itself to restore it to her—that I had anticipated sending it by boat or railway, but both means of conveyance seemed open to danger to an object of so much value—that I regretted the Post-office, in the form of a registered letter, was not available for its reception—that I had slept with it near my pillow—that I had had all my meals with it—that it had never left my side—and that I had decided upon bringing it up to town myself before I left England, and depositing it in her hands, when I hoped my carelessness and inattention would be forgiven.

I was musing thus, when the cherished object referred to was suddenly and sharply jerked away from over my head, and I felt my hold loosening from the handle. I could not for the moment see to what this action of the umbrella was attributable. I however held on to the handle firmly, and as it was still being dragged in one direction, and in the same sharp and jerking manner, I continued to jerk in the contrary direction. At length I gave a powerful and sudden pull; there was a short,

female scream—a sharp crack—a burst of laughter, and the umbrella was free. I instinctively felt that I had done something horrible. I started to my feet; and the first thing I saw, hanging to one of the chess-pawn tips of my aunt's still-opened umbrella, was a lady's hat and feathers. The second thing I saw was a very large collection of merry-looking faces, enjoying my discomfiture exceedingly; and the third thing I saw was an extremely pretty young lady, without a hat, and all her hair pulled about her face, looking very much confused and frightened. I perceived at once the state of things. One of those cursed chess-pawn tips of my aunt's umbrella had caught in the young lady's hat, as she was passing behind me. In my reckless madness I had torn the young lady's hat off her head, and had caused her to scream. I had pulled all her beautiful black hair down—raised blushes of confusion upon her fair face—and excited the laughter of the unfeeling crowd. I felt myself a brute. I closed the umbrella, and undid the hat from its hold. I muttered apologies as fast I could speak them, and asked a thousand, ten thousand, a million pardons, for the offence I had committed. My face was crimson; my hand trembled. She did not take the hat I was holding towards her, for a time, since she was engaged in collecting her dishevelled hair—putting it back again into a little elegant fish net she had worn on her head. She

seemed to be years in doing this; and all this time I was standing before her, bowing and blushing, and babbling apologies, whilst she, with her two arms raised over her head, and forming a sort of framework to her face, was looking down upon me, with what appeared to me to be a mixture of curiosity, amusement, and pity.

"I shall never forgive myself," I stammered, still holding her hat towards her, "for having unintentionally been guilty of this rudeness. I ought not to have put up the umbrella. It was selfish—it was brutal in me to do so."

"You need not apologise, sir, or blame yourself," she said, with a laughing look; "it was quite an accident; and the fault, if there is any, was altogether mine; I ought to have looked where I was going, and not have passed so near to your umbrella."

"I sincerely hope," I continued, "I have not hurt you, in my rude attempts to release my umbrella. I can assure you that I would have been more cautious—more gentle in my conduct—had I known my umbrella had become attached to your hat."

I was stammering more and more, and my face was feeling hotter and hotter. I did not seem to have proper command over the words I continued to utter. They appeared to form themselves, of their own accord, into absurd observations. The young

lady continued to look prettier than ever; but of all the beautifully obstinate heads of hair I had ever seen or heard of, I think hers was the worst. She was still endeavouring to fix it properly in her net; and she must have noticed my impatience, for she said, with sly satire, as she patted the side of her head gently with her delicate little hand, "I hope I am not troubling you too much in holding my hat—I shall not be long."

"Oh, dear no!—oh, certainly not!—oh, pray don't mention it!—oh! trouble indeed! Oh!—ha! ha!—how can you suppose such a thing!—oh!——"

I felt my remarks were becoming idiotic.

"I am well aware," she said, "it must be very inconvenient to you in having to occupy yourself so long upon such an absurd accident, and I must, in turn, ask you to pardon me, for having placed you in a position which has subjected you to so much annoyance."

She looked so fascinating as she said this, in a light, merry, musical tone of voice, that I felt it hopeless to attempt an answer. She saw my confusion, and finished her hair with a few rapid strokes and turnings. "There," she said, "now I can relieve you of my hat. Thank you."

She took it, and fixed it on her head, whilst I stood, with a rude, blank stare, contemplating the operation, and looking straight into her bright face.

If she had appeared to me extremely pretty without the hat, she became positively lovely with it on, and I felt myself rooted to the spot, attracted by the fascination of her appearance. She tied the strings deliberately, without in any way noticing my conduct, her impression evidently being I was some eccentric creature, whose proceedings and manners she could afford to tolerate, for the sake of the amusement they afforded.

"I wish you good morning, sir," she said, when the hat was securely tied. "My friends will be waiting for me, and will be alarmed at my absence."

I mustered up resolution to speak.

"Pray excuse me," I said to her, "if I again declare to you my sincere sorrow for having put you to this trouble. It is not my fault—it is my fate." She stopped, and opened her large eyes with interest and attention. I lost my presence of mind again, but I went on, though somewhat incoherently—"Yes; I assure you it is my fate. I am connected with an object—mysteriously connected. It is allied to me by an inscrutable sympathy; and that object will be the index to my destiny through life. Through that object I have caused you annoyance. Whatever that cursed thing decrees of me I must obey it. Forgive me, therefore. Pity an unfortunate creature, allied for ever to a thing like this!"

I held up my aunt's umbrella with rather a dra-

matic attitude. The old head appeared to be grinning more savagely than ever. The young lady looked hard at the ugly object for a few moments, then curiously at me; and then, suddenly bursting into a musical laugh, exclaimed, "Oh! what fun—but there's papa"—turned, and ran laughing away.

Directly she had disappeared, the whole picture before me, which had appeared so smiling and pleasant, changed its hue, and I regarded everything through a distorted vision. My whole nature seemed to have changed under the magic influence of the little fairy who had appeared before me. I had thrown off my every-day feelings and emotions, and had discovered myself attired in a new suit of sensations and ideas. I had gone down a trap out of Fairyland, and I had come up another trap to find myself in a region where everybody wore masks, and looked gross and hideous. It was love at first sight. It was love, also, at second sight: for, had I been a clairvoyant of the most accomplished order, I could not have been more firmly impressed with the notion that I had loved this young lady in my dreams, years and years ago, and that my present meeting with her was merely the result of a foregone conclusion. I no longer felt of a light and mercurial disposition; I no longer regarded the modern Canutes sitting round me as old friends of my family circle. I felt actuated towards them

with a morbid sort of disgust, as if they belonged to another and inferior hemisphere altogether. I sickened at the sound of laughter; and I gave a wretch a penny who came and played "A kiss and nothing more," very much out of tune, on a barrel-organ, whilst I drank in every screeching, horrid note with delirious ecstasy.

With a knitted brow and throbbing breast I hurried from the sands, looking like an evil spirit in flight, and chewing the cud of my bitter reflections. I walked up and down the most deserted streets in the town, in the faint hope of seeing my fairy, and I struck the ferule of my umbrella upon the stones savagely as I went along. I did not seem to progress, however: for whenever fatigue or perspiration, or a passing perambulator, caused me to halt, I found I was always in the same thoroughfare. Now and then I stopped and gazed anxiously in at shop windows, or up at first-floors, or through garden railings, still faintly hoping I might catch a glimpse of my fairy, and very much puzzling the inhabitants of the establishments subjected to my observations, who came and looked at me, and evidently wondered whether I was a vocalist waiting for coppers, or a burglar watching for spoons. I rushed after distant female figures in hats, still faintly hoping I might see my fairy, and drew up suddenly as I approached them, much to their surprise and fear. I was wander-

ing about, as if some mysterious mechanism, forming part of my system, had been set in motion, and which was beyond my power of control. At length exhausted almost to fainting, and perspiring at every pore, I contrived to stay my mad and impetuous career, and returned to my lodgings. I did not wish to encounter Mrs. Toff, my landlady, who I knew would have cruelly hunted me with questions about what I would like for dinner, and when I would like it—a catechism I was not in a position at that moment to endure. I therefore went straightway to my bed-room on the second floor, locked the door, tore off my coat, waistcoat, and cravat, and opened the window to its widest extent; and having bathed my throbbing temples, until my head looked like a shipwrecked mariner's, and by this means somewhat cooled my heated blood, I threw myself upon the bed, to endeavour by rest to allay the excitement I had suffered. I lay in a half dreaming state for some time, listening to the roar of the sea, that seemed to me as if it were uttering a discourse in a loud tone, now and then enforcing its observations by a very emphatic thump. It appeared to round its periods with the most careful calculation as to effect; and, at the end of each period, it evidently used a very swelling word, and concluded with a thump. Then it waited to watch the effect; then it recommenced *sotto voce*, gradually working itself up until the paragraph

was completed, and then came another thump. It sounded to me as if the ocean had turned peripatetic preacher, and was holding forth at me upon my thoughts, feelings, and follies.

"Had I not altogether acted like an idiot?" roared the sea. "Had I not altogether brought my trouble upon myself? Was it not owing to my own imprudence my own fatuity? Was I not a fool? Perhaps I thought I could be introduced to my fairy, and that by steady perseverance, and desperate importunity, I might make such an impression as to justify me in offering her my hand and heart? If I did, I was presumptuous and an upstart. But perhaps you will say," the sea went on, "that you are in a good position; that you have excellent expectations; that you are young, and that you would make an affectionate and ever-attentive husband? Perhaps you say this. To this we answer: Beware lest you be eaten up with vanity. How are you to be introduced? Ha! my dear young friend, that's the point.. Men do not tear ladies' hats off by way of introduction. Neither is it an incentive to love. Ask the usages of society. Can you kneel in the broad light of day before your fairy? Can you offer her your hand and heart in the presence of a mocking crowd? Again, we point to the usages of society. Perhaps you will suggest that you will follow her shadow into its house; that you will knock, and knock, and

knock again, and ask to see her, that you may profess your love. Once again, we say, study the usages of society. Are you handsome? Think and ponder. Ask yourself: What am I? Who am I? What's my income? Are you saving and economical, and are you prepared to make a settlement? Consider! Are you adapted for a married life, and to encounter its responsibilities? If you say 'No,' then we say avoid it. If you say 'Yes,' then we tell you you are a braggart, and as such unfit for a state of bliss, for no man knows what he can do till he has tried."

The sea was going on in this fashion, thumping and roaring with great oratorical energy, when my attention to its very logical discourse was suddenly interrupted by observing an object in the room I had not previously noticed, and which caused me to start up from the bed in a sitting posture, and to wonder how in the name of all that was wonderful it had come there. Hanging on the peg of my door, where I usually hung my coat, was a bell-shaped object, with periodical ribs in its constitution, and which clearly from its construction was an article of somebody's attire, but which in an equal degree of clearness did not belong to me. A moment's earnest examination, and a minute's consideration, served to reveal the truth to me, and I fell back in a perfect roar of laughter. "By Jove, here's a joke!" I exclaimed; "somebody's been into my room by

mistake and hung a crinoline on my door-peg. It's that stupid servant, I warrant; or, perhaps, it's a new lodger, who has not rightly understood the locality of her own apartment; at any rate, it's a capital joke!" and I laughed louder than ever, and drummed my heels on the bed with delight. "How Mrs. Toff will stare when I inform her of the mistake. What fun her bewilderment, her confusion, and her apologies will create? Ha! ha! ha!" I was becoming almost hysterical with laughter, when I suddenly again started up into a sitting posture, by observing another object that had no more business in my room than the crinoline on the door-peg. This was a large black box, the extent of which seemed designed to contain such expansive articles as the one that had first attracted my notice. What was the meaning of this? Had Mrs. Toff let my apartment to somebody else whilst I was out, and had the new comer taken possession. It was too bad. I would have an immediate explanation. I jumped off the bed in a high state of rage, and seized a brush on the toilet-table to arrange my dishevelled hair before the glass, previous to descending to my sitting-room on the ground floor and having up the landlady. "Holloa!" I involuntarily exclaimed, "this is not my looking-glass!" No more it was; my looking-glass had a crack across it, and turned summersaults on its axis; this was a perfect glass, and stood still in its frame.

Neither was it my brush that I held in my hand; mine had a white back; this had a black one. Neither was it my washhand-stand; mine was green; this was yellow; besides, where was my Macassar and my bottle of Jockey Club? Everything in the apartment had changed. Again I rapidly endeavoured to account for the mystery. Was I dreaming? Was I a second edition of "Victorine?" Was I about to commence a series of horrible adventures, and upon my arriving at the lowest depths of misery and crime, and being drowned or poisoned or hung as a climax, awake again to find that I had been asleep all the time, with somebody's spirit in blue fire watching over me to read me a moral lesson. No; I was not. I was wide awake; and, as a further proof that I was so, I suddenly divined the real truth of my situation. It was I who had made the mistake; it was I who was in the wrong room, and that room a lady's. I rushed to the door; there was only one other room on the floor, and the door of this was open. It was not my room. I was on the second floor, too, and my bed-room ought to have been on a second floor! Where in the name of Heaven was I? I became dewy with a cold perspiration. I was not only in the wrong room, but I was actually in the wrong house! I then remembered, with vivid distinctness, that all the houses in the terrace where I had lodgings were exactly alike in appearance;

that it was almost impossible to distinguish any one house from the other; and that I had, on previous visits to Ramsgate, frequently made the pardonable mistake of going into the adjoining one instead of my own. I recollected that I had on one occasion dashed into the front parlour of the house I thought was mine, and in doing so had rushed into the centre of a dinner-party, and upset the servant who was coming out with a tray of glasses and cold meats; and that at another time, in making the same error, I had fallen over an old gentleman apparently tying his shoe-strings at the feet of his landlady. Never, however, had I been so absent in mind as to do what I had now done—of coming up to the second floor of the wrong house, and occupying the wrong room, and that room a lady's. It was, however, no use thinking about it: I must get out of the dilemma as quick as I could, and in the best way possible. If I had been a burglar, or a gentleman on a tight rope in the midst of fireworks, I could not have been more cautious in my perilous descent than I was in going down stairs. When I reached the first floor, I listened; but hearing no one moving I again proceeded. I was in the hall; the street door was open; a few more rapid steps, and the next moment I was in the street, breathing again, and feeling as if I had just escaped some terrible danger. Although my own house was next door, I was still so

excited with the thought of the adventure, that I did not care to go in, but continued to walk on; and I was even beginning to chuckle over the absurdity of the incident, and my good fortune in its not being attended with any unpleasant consequence, when, to the utter astonishment of a passing pot-boy and the alarm of an old lady in a Bath chair, I gave a bound into the air several feet high, and uttered a cry that could not have been considered anything less than a yell. A fearful fact had presented itself to me. I missed my umbrella! I had left my aunt's umbrella in the lady's room!

CHAPTER III.

My first feeling was that I had hopelessly lost my aunt's umbrella, and my agony and despair were bitter in the extreme. How could I return and recover it. Could I knock at the door, and explain to the landlady I had left an umbrella in a lady's room, on the second floor? Should I be believed, in the first instance; and, even if I were, might I not seriously compromise some innocent person by such an inquiry? On the other hand, what would my aunt say when she should hear of the loss of the object she cherished so highly; what would be her conduct towards me for the future? Should I not deservedly lose her regard altogether?

Should I not be ruthlessly discarded from her favour? Should I not cause her the most poignant disappointment and grief? Again, how would my own interests and fortunes be affected? Absurd and improbable as my aunt's prophecy concerning the old umbrella, in connection with myself, had appeared to me in the first instance, the more I had seen of it, and the more I had considered the subject, the more I became a proselyte to my aunt's opinion, that I was in some mysterious way identified with this ridiculous object. The adventures of the morning had certainly not in any way served to check the growth of this superstition in my mind; and my present alarming and perplexing situation, arising solely through the hated cause of all my troubles, almost convinced me that what I had regarded as a wild illusion, was a substantial fact. "When the old umbrella is lost, you will be lost also." These were the prophetic words of my aunt. If the cherished object should be lost, I felt certain some terrible calamity would befall me. At every hazard, therefore, I determined to regain possession of the umbrella; but how? I would not knock and inquire, for the reasons I have given above. I would wait a few minutes to collect myself, and then I would boldly march up the steps, through the door, up the stairs into the second floor room, recover my umbrella, and descend. I had gone up there once and come down

again, without encountering a soul, and why might I not do it a second time with equal success? If I were stopped, it would be quite time enough to explain matters. I would have given half I possessed to have been at that moment seized with the same absence of mind that led me to make the ascent to the second floor on the first occasion; for I felt, that going up two flights of stairs in cold blood, and with one's destinies hanging upon the result of reaching the top unobserved, was a very different undertaking to doing the same thing unintentionally. I continued to walk away from the house all this time; and, being now in front of an hotel, I entered the coffee-room, and ordered a glass of pale brandy. Directly the waiter brought it I seized the glass with avidity, literally threw its contents down my throat as if they had been pills, and nearly suffocated myself in consequence. The waiter stared hard, and I heard him mutter, in a subdued tone, "Well, I'm blessed; that's a good'un —that is." I felt the water in my eyes, and my throat burning; but I also felt my courage rising rapidly, under the influence of the spirit. I thought I would try the effect on the waiter. He was a little waiter, of a meek and white appearance, and I therefore asked him, in a loud, bold, defiant, bullying way, "What there was to pay?" and, as I thought he hesitated in answering, I added, imperiously, "Come—out with it man! What are you staring

at? Do you think I wish to eat you? Eh! fellow!"

The little waiter started at my altered manner, and sidled towards the door, evidently becoming somewhat alarmed. I was delighted. I marched after him, and shouted in a threatening tone, "How much, fellow? how much? By the Lord Harry, I'll know how much!" I made a feint to rush at him; but, with a shriek of "One Shilling!" he had vanished through the door; and I heard him roaring up and down the passages of the hotel, and telling everybody that there was an escaped lunatic in the coffee-room, who had swallowed a shilling's worth of brandy, and was now thirsting for his—the little waiter's—blood. I left half-a-crown on the coffee-room table, and issued forth, feeling much refreshed, and more determined and resolute. I was now so decided upon at once boldly entering the house, and walking up to the second floor, even if dragons and lions should be sitting on the door scrapers, that I ran all the way to the terrace where the house was situate, and arrived in front of it almost breathless. I looked up at the windows to see if any one were visible in the rooms, and who might observe me coming in, and, seeing nobody, I whistled a popular melody in the most cavalier manner I could assume, and then, forcing a smile on to my countenance, to excite the notion in the minds of passers bye that I was a resident in the

house I was entering, and not a housebreaker effecting a surreptitious entrance, I sprang up the front steps, turned the handle of the street door, and mounted the first flight of stairs. Pshaw! it was nothing, after all. I felt encouraged by my success; and I was going up the second flight, taking strides of three steps at a time, when, to my utter discomfiture, I found myself suddenly standing face to face with a stout, elderly gentleman, with white hair, a profusion of white whiskers, and a red face, who was coming down, and who, by means of his figure alone, in the narrow staircase, effectually prevented my further progress upwards.

He eyed me sternly for a few moments, and then he said, "I beg your pardon, sir, but may I ask where you are going? There is no other family than my own resident in this house, and I have not the pleasure of knowing you."

These observations and questions, under the circumstances, were so much to the point, that I felt miserably at a loss for an answer. I however stammered out, in an inquiring manner, "No other family resident in the house? oh, indeed! are you quite sure?"

"Quite," said the stout gentleman, emphatically, as if he were decided upon stopping any further argument, on that point at least.

"Dear me!" I continued, assuming a look of great perplexity, "then I fear—I fear I must have made a mistake."

"No doubt about it," said the stout gentleman, more emphatically than before, and commencing to descend. Of course, as he advanced I had to retreat, which I did in a hesitating, undecided manner, that did not at all serve to allay the suspicions the stout gentleman had evidently commenced to form of my conduct. It was hopeless to expect I could get up stairs, with a suspicious and emphatic stout gentleman persisting in coming down them, so I said, with as good a grace as I could, "I have mistaken the house, I see."

"Clearly," with still greater emphasis, and coming down two steps.

"It is very absurd, certainly. I have to apologise. It is very inconvenient not to be able to know your own house."

"Very."

"So many similar mistakes occur in Ramsgate. The houses are so much alike."

"Indeed!"

We were now coming down very fast.

"The only way," I continued, "I can see of preventing such accidents, is always to knock."

"Precisely."

"But, then again, that gives the servant a great deal of unnecessary trouble."

"Does it?"

Nothing seemed to alter or move the emphatic gentleman. His eye was fixed steadily on me;

and, as he marched on, so I retreated, my face still towards him. We had turned the corner of the first landing, and were now descending the last flight.

"It's a fine day," I ventured to observe.

"Is it?"

"I am extremely sorry to have given you this trouble. I will be more careful for the future."

"Good day," said the stout gentleman.

We were on the door mat.

"Good day," I said, smilingly, determined to keep it up to the last, and making a feeble effort of politeness, by raising my hat, a proceeding which did not seem to weigh favourably in the mind of the stout gentleman, for he eyed me with still greater sternness, and opened the door to its very widest extent, as if he desired to render my egress as easy and expeditious as possible. I stepped out. I heard the door slam violently behind me, and there I was in the street again, still without my aunt's umbrella.

This would never do. I immediately felt I had been deficient in determination and nerve in my interview with the stout gentleman. I ought to have been firmer and more decided in my manner—to have stated my true position, and demanded the return of my property. I had been guilty of a piece of pusillanimity, in allowing myself to be thus ushered out of the house, uttering fictitious

excuses and forced apologies. I was a pretty fellow, certainly. I could bully a little waiter, but I did not dare to demand my own from a stout gentleman. The picture would not endure a moment's contemplation. The stout gentleman was still in the passage, no doubt. He would not have had time to go up stairs. I would open the door, and firmly, but politely, demand the restoration of my chattel. Accordingly, I again seized the handle, turned it, threw open the door, and once more stepped into the passage. I had begun, in a bold tone, "I beg your pardon, sir; but——" I stopped. The hall was empty. The emphatic gentleman was not there. I listened. No one was stirring. I was not going to call up stairs to the stout gentleman that I had come back, and that I wished to speak with him; that would have been rude. Nor was I going out again, simply because I had found nobody in the passage; that would have been ridiculous. The thought instantly suggested itself to my mind, that I might perhaps this time succeed in getting to the second floor without encountering any opposition. I again closed the door, and again commenced mounting the stairs, for the third time that afternoon. I moved on the extreme tips of my toes, as if I were dancing a *pas fantastique* in a ballet; and I had reached the first floor, when, as ill fortune would have it, my foot, unaccustomed to the peculiar position in which I was employing it, caught in

a stair-rod, and down I fell, with a heavy crash, on to the landing, upsetting a scuttle of coals that stood outside the drawing-room door, in my fall. I was just conscious of hearing a series of short, female shrieks, a rough voice using emphatic expressions of anger, and a rush of footsteps, when the drawing-room door was thrown violently open, and the stout gentleman stood over me in a threatening attitude. His eyes glared with rage; his face was redder than ever, and his whiskers looked intensely white and bristling.

"What is the meaning of this, sir? Who are you? What are you doing here? Why do you persist in coming into my house, sir? I insist upon an explanation."

"Oh! I'm sure they're thieves, Captain Tompion," said a female voice, evidently in great alarm, from the interior of the room. "I'm sure they're thieves. Send for the police at once."

I saw I could not be in any worse position than I then was, so I scrambled up, and, with as much dignity as a person in my then situation, standing amongst a quarter of a hundred of knobly coals, and with patches of coal dust on his face and hands, could be expected to assume, I said—

"I did not desire, sir, that the intentions with which I came into this house should be divulged."

"No doubt you didn't," said the emphatic gen-

tleman, whose name appeared to be Captain Tompion.

"Spare your sneers, sir," I continued, "until you have heard me. The circumstances which originally caused me to come here were purely accidental; but the result of the accident was such that, had I discovered myself, I might have seriously compromised some innocent third party. I was desirous of avoiding this contingency. I was anxious——

"You will excuse me, sir," said Captain Tompion, "but I neither understand nor believe a word you are saying. I find you on my staircase. That is in itself suspicious. Your answers to my questions are a series of prevarications as to why you are there. That is still more suspicious. I conduct you to the street door, and immediately afterwards I find you have again clandestinely entered my house, and upset my coals. *That* is convincing."

My blood was getting up, "Since, sir," I replied, "you force me, by your taunts, to reveal the reasons which brought me here, be it so, let the consequences be what they may. I have come for my umbrella!"

Had I told the stout gentleman I had come for his gold watch and seals, or for his diamond shirt pin, or that I was prepared to allow him the alternative of giving me his money or his life, he certainly could not have presented such a picture of astonishment as he

did when he heard this declaration. That I, whom he had evidently commenced to regard as a superior sort of area sneak, should have come into his house to demand "my umbrella," was a piece of such gross impertinence that could only be explained by the fact of my being in an habitually confused state of intellect upon the subject of *meum* and *tuum*. He suggested as much, when he said—

"Your umbrella! What umbrella? Confound your impudence. I suppose you mean *my* umbrella?"

"No, sir," I said, gently but firmly. "I repeat what I have before said. I came here for my umbrella; and, what is more, I do not again leave this house without it."

"What does he say?" said the female voice, sharply, from the interior. "How can you have patience with the fellow? If he won't go away, why don't you bundle him down stairs? I would, I know, if I was not an invalid."

"Pray, don't disturb yourself, Mrs. Tompion. Pray, leave the affair to me. I can manage it much better without your interference."

I had folded my arms and looked defiantly at Captain Tompion, so as to convey to him, by my attitude, the impression that I both was and would remain a statue on that particular spot until my request was granted.

My determination very much increased the asto-

nishment of the Captain. He was not quite prepared for such a display of decision on my part, so he rattled his watch seals with great nervous energy, and looked extremely hard and savage. Mrs. Tompion, however, interrupted the discussion by commencing to utter short gurgling moans.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" said Mrs. Tompion, "what a place this Ramsgate is! I always thought that something would occur to us if we came here. Now, if we had gone to Scarborough, as I wanted you, Captain Tompion, this would never have happened; but you always will have your own way; and when you see I am so ill that I cannot move out of a chair, you don't care, not you; and if I was being murdered by housebreakers, or rifled by highwaymen, it would be all the same to you, I am sure."

"Pray do not make such ridiculous observations, my dear," said the Captain, who was getting altogether rather bewildered—what with my firmness on the one hand, and the want of it on the part of Mrs. Tompion, and his having to deal with us both at the same time. "I am doing all I can to get rid of this person, but he persists in saying he wants his umbrella."

"I'll ring for the police," screamed Mrs. Tompion.

Captain Tompion, gave me one look, and seeing I was still immoveable, and not being able to suggest any other remedy to compel me to depart,

said, with great emphasis, "Do, my love;" and then he dived both his hands deep into his pockets, and said fiercely to me, "Now we shall see, sir, whether you will leave this house or not."

There was a great deal of moaning from the interior of the room, followed by a terrible pull of the drawing-room bell. This was succeeded by a second, and a third—each louder and longer than its predecessor—until fifty bells appeared to be ringing at once, in the midst of which a female from the nether regions was heard screaming, at the highest pitch of her voice, "Coming! coming!" and this being considered the point at which she might safely desist, Mrs. Tompion left off ringing and took to groaning louder than ever, and calling "Thieves!"

"What is the matter, Cap'en Tompion—oh, what is the matter?" said a middle-aged woman, evidently the landlady, coming up the stairs, bringing with her an incense of dinners, and wiping a very hot and greasy face with a very dirty and greasier apron.

"Go for the police, Mrs. Smuggs," screamed Mrs. Tompion, "there's thieves in the house! They fell over the coal-scuttle going up stairs, and your master's caught one of them, who won't go away."

"Thieves!" echoed Mrs. Smuggs, looking first at me, then at the coals, then at Captain Tompion,

then at the state of the stair-carpet, and finally putting her head over the banisters, and shrilly shrieking, "Maria, bring up the broom!"

Having thus relieved herself, she placed her arms a-kimbo, and, with an air of great determination, addressed me as "Young feller," and demanded to know what it was I might please to want.

"Simply my umbrella, madam."

Come, she was not going to stand no nonsense like that; I had come to the wrong shop to play up my larks, and she would let me know, in two two's, what was what.

"If you will have the kindness," I said, deliberately, "to go into the front room on the second floor, you will there find a green, old-fashioned umbrella, with a carved handle. That umbrella belongs to me; it was left there by accident, and I have called to recover it."

In the second floor front, indeed! How could that be, seeing that that was Miss Annie's room? Did I take her for a fool? if so, she would soon let me know the contrairy; and that she hadn't kep' a 'ouse at Ramsgate for fifteen year, and done for the best of families, to be frightened at a feller. How could my umbrella be in Miss Annie's room?

"How, indeed!" said Captain Tompion, still incredulous; "a pretty excuse, certainly. However, go up Mrs. Smuggs, and convince this person he is mistaken, since *I* cannot."

"Don't do anything of the kind, Mrs. Smuggs," said Mrs. Tompion from the room; "go for the police; depend upon it he's got his accomplices."

"Have the kindness to be quiet, my love," said Captain Tompion. "Go up, Mrs. Smuggs. I'll take care of him; he shan't escape."

Thus enjoined the landlady proceeded up stairs, muttering expressions of doubt as to the state the meat then roasting would be in if she didn't go back to the kitchen at a very early period, since that girl Maria was worse than useless, and always did everything to rags, herself included. It was a period of great suspense. The stout Captain kept his eye sternly fixed upon me, whilst I assumed the best appearance of indifference I was able. A few anxious moments, and I heard the hurried steps of Mrs. Smuggs descending the stairs.

"Is this it?" said the landlady, holding up my aunt's umbrella on the top stair.

I gave vent to a rapturous expression of joy. I could have embraced the landlady. "It is; it is," I shouted; "that's my umbrella. You see, sir," I added, turning to Captain Tompion, "that I spoke the truth. You see how unjust you have been in your suspicions of me."

Instead of the Captain offering me any apologies for his conduct—instead of his withdrawing the offensive expressions he had used towards me—he burst into a state of greater excitement than I had

yet seen him suffer, and roared out: "Where did you find it, ma'am?"

"In Miss Annie's room," replied the landlady; "there it was, sure enow, a standin' in the corner."

"How did it come there?" he continued, addressing me. "This is even worse, sir, than before. I demand an explanation; in fact, I insist upon an explanation. How came your umbrella in my daughter's room? Where is Annie? Go and fetch her, ma'am; go and fetch her instantly."

"What's that about Annie?" screamed Mrs. Tompion, getting more opaque than ever. "Oh, dear, when will this end—when will he go away? Has he been robbing things out of Annie's room? I hope she hasn't lost her new light blue silk?"

"I assure you, sir, it was entirely through an accident in my coming by mistake into the wrong house that"——

"Don't humbug me, sir," shouted Captain Tompion; "it seems to me you do nothing else but come into wrong houses."

"Sir!" I shouted in return.

"Ha! sir to you! What do you mean? Do you think I've been in the Royal Navy all my life to be humbugged in this fashion? To be called 'Sir!' in that fashion. How dare you come here, and endeavour to compromise my daughter in this way? Who are you, I should like to know?"

"I never saw your daughter in my life," I

shouted. "Give me my umbrella, and let me go."

"I shall do nothing of the kind; I'll have this matter cleared up before you leave this house."

"And I'll have my umbrella."

"D— your umbrella!"

The stout gentleman was in a paroxysm of rage, and he rushed into the drawing-room, followed by the landlady, still holding the cause of all this confusion, and begging him to be calm or he might injure a "wessel." I instinctively followed them. Directly I entered the room, the lady who had been keeping up the running fire of cloudy comments during my dialogue with Captain Tompion, and who looked like a very large bundle of shawls, in a mob cap, screamed out, "Oh, he's come in—there'll be murder!" and commenced pulling the bell-rope with great energy. The more I shouted my expostulations and apologies, the more the stout gentleman stormed; the more the stout gentleman stormed, the more the landlady begged him to be calm, and think of his "wessels;" and all the time we were doing this, there was the invalided lady pulling the bell-rope with both hands, as if she had been ringing a triple-bob-major, or hauling taut a sail. The confusion had reached its height, when a door was heard to close, and a light step and a light laugh were heard on the stairs. There was immediate silence in the room, and the invalid lady desisted from exhaustion.

"There is my daughter, just come in," said Captain Tompion. "Now you shall hear a denial from her own lips. Now you shall discover, sir, how futile your endeavours have been to compromise an angel of innocence."

"Oh! you villing!" said Mrs. Smuggs.

The next moment the owner of the light laugh and light step tripped merrily into the room, but stopped suddenly on beholding such evidences of excitement before her. I looked at her, and what were my horror and confusion when I beheld in her, my fairy of the sands, the young lady whose hat I had so rudely torn from her head in the morning. It was that gentle being, then, that I had compromised by my absence of mind. It was her that I now had the credit of endeavouring wilfully to injure. I felt as if I were going mad. However, I determined she should not recognise me, and immediately covered my face as well as I could with my handkerchief. Again did the cursed umbrella thwart my intentions, and drag me deeper into the dilemma; for, immediately after the entrance of the young lady, and almost before she had had time to run and kiss her mother, and to ask what was the matter, Mrs. Smuggs held up the umbrella before her eyes, and said, "Do you know this umbrella, miss, and whose it is?"

The young lady looked at it for a moment earnestly, and then, glancing towards me, where I

was standing trembling and wretched, and turning round and round to avoid her recognition, like a feeble top on its last spin, burst into a long peal of musical laughter, and said, "Oh, yes; I have seen it before. It belongs to that gentleman."

I thought Captain Tompion had lost his power of speech altogether when he heard this statement. He stood glaring at me with his mouth open for a few seconds, whilst his hands opened and shut with a spasmodic energy, as if he were contemplating the propriety of immediately springing at my throat.

"How dare you pursue my daughter, sir," he shouted, "unknown to me, her father, sir? How dare you deny to me your acquaintance with her, sir? What is the meaning of this villany? How dare you take your umbrella where you did? Do you think by such means to compel me to receive you into my house?"

"Oh! papa," said the poor dear little fairy, looking ready to cry, "what *are* you saying? What *is* the matter? What *has* this gentleman done?"

"Done, my dear," continued Captain Tompion, embracing his daughter, and glaring at me over his shoulder, "he has endeavoured to injure you."

This was too much. I lost my head. "I deny it, sir," I cried. "I can bear all your unjust imputations but that. I should be a wretch, indeed, if I had even contemplated such a villany. I declare to you

I did not know that lady was your daughter. I swear to you I came here wholly by accident, and I never had a thought either of injuring her or annoying you. When you are calmer, sir, you will regret this harshness towards me. You shall know then how much you have wronged me; and, in supposing I could ever have plotted to injure you and yours, how deeply you have injured me." My voice faltered as I concluded, and I felt a choking sensation in my throat, for I saw that poor little frightened Annie had fairly burst into tears, and was now crying, with her head on her father's shoulder.

"Oh, papa," said the dear girl, quite ignorant as to what the cause of this strange scene might be, "do forgive him; I'm sure he didn't mean to do it?"

"Mrs. Smuggs," said the ruthless Captain Tompion, "give him his umbrella, then, and let him go. Leave my house, sir, he continued, "and I trust we may never meet again."

"I am sorry," I said, taking the umbrella, "I am sorry that we should part, Captain Tompion, with any bitterness between us. As to meeting again, you may rest assured that it shall not be my fault if your wish is not fulfilled. I will leave Ramsgate at once; but I will not longer bear with me an object which has caused me so much wretchedness. I attribute all that has occurred to the pos-

session of this umbrella. Wherever I carry it misfortune will overtake me. My fate, I am told, is allied to this object. If it is so I care not: for here, in your presence, I will destroy the cause of all this trouble."

And so saying I seized the old umbrella, and, with the fury of a madman, I struck it across my bended knee. Its old ribs cracked loud and piercingly. I struck it again and again. I saw its eyes looking appealingly at me. Little Annie, too, screamed, and held up her hands as if pleading in its behalf. As I met her appealing look, I lost my power to strike again; my strength appeared to fail me, and, the window being open, I threw the old umbrella violently out, with some faint hope that it might fall into the sea and be lost for ever. "There, sir!" I continued, when I had done this; and after I had waited a short time to recover from my excitement and exertion—"There, sir! have I now convinced you of my desire to obtain your good opinion before we part? Have I now afforded you sufficient evidence, that what I have said I believe to be the truth? Have I now shown you how deeply you have wounded my feelings by your harshness and injustice?"

With one long parting look at little Annie, I was rushing to the door, when who should I encounter standing on the threshold, looking at me with a sternness I shall never forget, but my aunt! She

was drawn up to her full height; her arms were crossed on her waist, and she appeared as silent and as rigid as marble. Behind her stood Mr. Pilgrim, whose face wore a savage expression of repugnance, directed at me. How did they come there. Were they real, or were they but "false creations of a heat-oppressed brain." I was rivetted to the spot, and my astonishment was in some measure shared by all the other actors in the scene, who regarded my aunt and her attendant with inquiring and anxious glances.

"So, Herbert," said my aunt, sternly and prophetically, "am I too late? I started from town directly I received your letter, to save you, if I could, but I have arrived, I fear, too late. I came to the address you gave, next door. You were not at home. but you had been seen coming into this house three different times during the day. I saw the umbrella fall from the window. I knew you were in trouble. I entered; but I regret to think that perhaps I am too late." She pointed as she spoke to the old umbrella, in Mr. Pilgrim's hand.

Abashed before her penetrating glance, I said, "Forgive me, aunt, for what I have done; it was you who made me believe in the evil character of that object; and if I endeavoured to rid myself of it, it was because I have had no rest since I took it away. I could not any longer endure the misery with which it has surrounded me."

"Herbert!" she said, still standing on the same spot, "you should learn to endure things with patience and submission. You do not know how far the evils we have to encounter, and the ills we have to support, are not designed to bring us happiness. In all his wild and desperate adventures your poor uncle Gregory, of the Pelican, never suffered but he did so happily. How do you know that the misfortunes which you accuse this umbrella of having brought upon you, may not have been designed as blessings? I know poor uncle Gregory, of the Pelican, would have told you so."

Old Tompion had been listening attentively to my aunt's lecture, and when she had come to this point he burst out—

"What, brave old Gregory, of the Pelican! Did you know him, madam?"

"He was my brother," said my aunt, without moving a muscle or exhibiting the remotest surprise. In her opinion the entire world had heard of, or ought to have heard of, "Uncle Gregory, of the Pelican;" and that all the world knew or ought to have known she was his sister.

"Your brother, madam—and you, sir?" turning to me—

"He was my uncle, sir," I said.

"What, brave old Gregory, of the Pelican! Old Greggs, as we used to call him! What, he your brother and your uncle! He, my dear old friend

and benefactor — my comrade and my chum—whose sword saved my life in a hand-to-hand encounter with the pirates up the Irrawaddy, and who stood godfather to my dear Annie here! He, the brave old salt—the kind old trump! Give me your hand, madam—give me your hand, sir! God save the Queen and bless you both!"

The stout gentleman, in great excitement, seized my aunt's hand, and shook it warmly; and then, having done the same to me, he kissed his daughter, wiped his eyes, and took the old umbrella out of Mr. Pilgrim's hand.

"Why, yes—now I look at it again—this was old Greggs' umbrella. I know it well. I know the head! Why he brought it to the christening of my dear Annie here. You recollect, don't you, dear? Oh! no; I forget myself. Of course you were too young to recollect old Greggs standing godfather to you, and leaning on this old umbrella. Why, he was lame then, and if it hadn't been for this support, he couldn't have stood godfather at all. That very day, ma'am," he said to my aunt, "we made a contract—old Greggs and I did—a solemn contract, by word of mouth, and this old umbrella was the witness; and that contract was—I may mention it to you, madam—

He leant his head on my aunt's shoulder, and whispered in her ear. My aunt started, and opened her eyes very wide, and said, "Indeed!"

Her frigid manner melted like ice before the rosy sun of the old Captain's beaming countenance. As for that old gentleman, directly he had made the communication he started back roaring with laughter, slapping his thighs and calling out—"Don't say a word, that's all. It's a fine joke, ain't it; but whatever you do, don't say a word." He then danced madly round the room, in the course of which proceedings he bundled Mrs. Smuggs out of the apartment, bidding her get the dinner ready, and knives and forks for two more, and put down more fowls; then he kissed his daughter, and said, "Oh, you darling!" then he hit me in the ribs, and said, "Oh, you dog!" then he shook up Mrs. Tompion, who had gone to sleep; and upon her waking and looking very much scared, he shouted in her ear that "Old Greggs' sister and old Greggs' nephew" would stop to dinner, which induced the still dim Mrs. Tompion, in her ignorance as to who the parties might be, to observe that it was fortunate the spoons were electro-plated—which might have been a compliment, but which sounded very unlike one; and finally, he sank exhausted into an arm-chair, where he sat almost breathless, half crying with laughter, and supremely happy, affectionately hugging my aunt's umbrella!

CHAPTER IV.

I did not go on to the Continent that summer. I thought Ramsgate a charming and delightful place to stop at for a few months' together. I wondered how anybody could prefer the Alps, or the Rhine, or Paris. Strange to say, old Tompion and his family stopped at Ramsgate longer than they had originally intended: poor Mrs. Tompion was such an invalid, and required so much nursing, and the sea breeze did her so much good. I sympathised so much with her in her ailments, too, that I could not but call at least once a day to ascertain how she was, and whether she required anything; and, strange to say, that she generally did require something, which I always volunteered to obtain, and which she was always delighted to accept. Not that she was very good company, for she had a curious habit of going to sleep whenever I came; and old Tompion always wanted to look at some particular object a long way out at sea, to ascertain whether it was a fishing-smack or a whale. On these occasions I had no alternative but to listen to the prattle of little Annie, or to try the new music with her on the piano, just to see whether we could get on pretty well together; and, strange to say, we did get on so well together, and were so very

successful, that we generally encored everything we attempted, and thought the new music about the best music that had ever, without any exception, been composed.

The time flagged so little, too, in this amusement, that I was rather sorry than otherwise, when Mrs. Tompion (although I had called expressly to see her) woke up from her sleep to describe some wonderful dream she had had about a funeral, or old Tompion returned from his inspection of the object out at sea, to relate that he thought he had made it out, and then went on to talk about "top-gallants" and "tenders," and "making way," and a variety of other nautical matters I did not precisely understand, but which, nevertheless, made him chuckle immensely. It was quite surprising, too, to think how many places there were in the neighbourhood that were worth a visit, and how few of them either the Tompions or I had ever previously visited; and, as Mrs. Tompion fortunately got so much better as to be ordered carriage exercise, and the weather was remarkably fine, of course advantage was taken by her family to show her about. Of course, also, Mrs. Tompion had to be on all such occasions helped into the carriage and helped out of the carriage, and affectionately bolstered and generally looked after; and as Mrs. Tompion was in this respect too much for one, and more than enough for two, my services were accepted to make up the third.

A circumstance, too, which always afforded us great pleasure in these little trips, was to see Mrs. Tompion so far recovered as to be anxious to get out of the carriage and endeavour to walk up precipices to look at views, supposed to be very beautiful when seen from a great height; and our satisfaction would have been probably still greater, only Mrs. Tompion, after being hoisted up a very short distance, invariably broke down, and requested to be allowed to sit still a short time, which she immediately proceeded to do. Captain Tompion could not leave her under such circumstances, and it would have been a pity, so poor Mrs. Tompion used to observe, that the young people should lose the view on her account, and that, therefore, they must go up and see it. This the "young people," being admirers of nature, and attracted by the prospect of seeing a beautiful view, and not desiring to act contrary to the wishes of poor dear Mrs. Tompion, never objected to doing; and it was really wonderful how extremely beautiful the views always turned out to be, it being admitted that they were infinitely superior to anything that could be seen in any other part of the world, and quite worth the time, however long it might be—and it was never very short—occupied in observing them.

Strange to say, I had become so domestically inclined by paying so many attentions to Mrs. Tompion. I had seen her suffering

so amiably, and had found her to be so pleased with my society, that I became convinced that the feeling of waiting upon anybody one was attached to, and performing little kindnesses, was rather a more pleasant thing altogether than scampering about the world alone, and sickening oneself with selfish enjoyments. So that when one morning, after the lapse of two months, I received a long and affectionate letter from my aunt, suggesting, in a cursory sort of manner, the propriety of my getting settled and having a home of my own, and asking me whether it was ever probable I should find any young person who would be able to secure my affections, and who would not refuse mine in return, I came to the conclusion, derived from a careful perusal of the epistle, that my aunt was about the most sensible woman that had ever lived. Being, as I was, on extremely friendly, and even confidential, terms with old Captain Tompion, I took the opportunity, the very same evening, when the family had gone to bed, and whilst he smoked his pipe and drank his grog, of reading my aunt's letter to him, and asking his advice upon the subject. It was a very remarkable circumstance, that, directly I had done this, the old Captain jumped up and seized my hand, and shook it so hard that I thought he would have wrenched it off, and informed me that "I had made him happy," and that the contract he had made with his dear friend, old

Greggs, would now be fulfilled; for that contract was, that his two godchildren should be united if they ever should meet and love each other. "You, dear boy," said Captain Tompion, "and my little Annie were good old Greggs' godchildren. I know she loves you."

"And I love her, sir, dearly."

"I know you do. You shall have a plum with her, dear boy. God save the Queen, and bless you both!"

The day dear Annie and I were married, and as we were coming out of church to the carriages, it commenced to drizzle. Mr. Pilgrim stepped forward, and over our heads extended my aunt's umbrella. The old thing looked quite proud and delighted. It seemed as if it were a good spirit stretching out its arms above us to bless us in our happiness.